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# ASEBL Journal

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Papers from the Moral Sense Colloquium III  
Held at St. Francis College, Brooklyn, 2 June 2017

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From the Editors

In line with the mission and goals of the Evolutionary Studies Collaborative, St. Francis College held its third Moral Sense Colloquium on 2 June 2017 to mark the thirtieth anniversary of the publication of Richard Alexander's *The Biology of Moral Systems*. The Keynote speaker was legendary biologist Dr. Robert Trivers. The Plenary speaker was biologist and philosopher Dr. David Lahti. There was one morning panel and two afternoon panels on a range of subjects related to the moral sense. Importantly, the conference was truly interdisciplinary and brought together scholars from disciplines as diverse as biology, communications, religious studies, philosophy, psychology, including a student panel respondent who is studying English and American literature. The full program is available on the Evolutionary Studies Collaborative page at the St. Francis College site, [here](#).

Although all of the presentations and talks are not represented in this issue, we have tried to provide a good sample. Comments from other conference presenters on the papers are included to help give a flavor of the discussions that took place during the colloquium.

A key debate among some philosophers, natural scientists, and social scientists concerns the origins of morality, and much has been published on the topic. See, for example, the psychological perspective of Dennis Krebs (2011) and the anthropological perspective of Christopher Boehm (2012). As Trivers (1971) notes, praise and blame “enhance ‘fitness’” since these “select for altruistic motivations, and thus for reliability in others” (694). Fitness itself, of course, does not survive; rather, traits and characteristics that contribute to survival and reproduction persist and evolve. Morality is a behavior, and behaviors evolve. What we call our moral sentiments have equivalents in other species. Take, for instance, empathy, a subject of study by primatologists Jessica Flack and Frans de Waal (2002). Even before human culture there were early forms of elevating or ostracizing one socially, as seen today across non-human primate species. However, we need the wisdom of philosophers to help us understand biology's implications.

Readers wishing to participate in the conversation should contact editor Gregory F. Tague for the possibility of a guest post on the ASEBL blog.

Sincerely,  
Gregory F. Tague, Ph.D. (English), Editor  
Clayton Shoppa, Ph.D. (Philosophy), Guest Co-Editor

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## Neurobiology, Intention and Decision

Clayton Shoppa

Very late in his philosophical career, Friedrich Schelling gives a lecture on the principles of philosophy in Berlin. He devotes a portion of his talk to what he calls “The Exhibition of the Process of Nature.” Darwin was in his 30s when these lectures occurred, busy writing about geology, volcanoes and barnacles. Not unlike Darwin, Schelling thinks we are thoroughly natural entities. Working at a very high altitude, Schelling wonders about what kind of thing the cosmos must be for it to permit philosophy. The universe, as we are supposed to call it today, really does emerge, really does move, and really does decay. Likewise with entities. If beavers know how to build dams, the universe does too. If you know how to ride the subway, the universe does too. If you fall in love, the universe does too. Physics studies motion, the universe in so far as it moves, chemistry the active and reactive qualities of bodies by which elemental bodies form compounds according to ratios, and so on through the list of sciences and their proper objects. For Schelling philosophy studies “the existent in general,” the ordered network of operations of being.

Again working from a very high altitude, Schelling reconstructs and rejects previous generations of philosophers. As he exhibits nature as a process, he reviews his theory of the potencies – the idea that sailed a thousand philosophy dissertations – and he reaches back to Aristotle, pretending Aristotle reaches exactly the same conclusion as he does, but it is the end of the lecture that is most interesting to us here. The network of plants and animals, what we might call non-human nature, serves as a precondition to consciousness. The natural ascent from stellar corpses to planets to grasses, tall trees and predatory birds and creatures of the deep seas, of creeping things, of three-toed sloths and chimpanzees, all of this Schelling labels “becoming conscious.” Non-human nature starts what we complete. It serves as the metaphysical premise, the precursor, for humanity, and humanity, he says, is nothing but consciousness. Each of us contributes to the idea of humanity. The record of our choices adds to, contributes to, the record of humanity in the sense of the meaning of humanity.

With typical post-Kantian grandeur Schelling writes, “We must of course assume that the Earth is the point of emergence for humanity – why, we do not know, it refers to relations we cannot survey, but humanity is therefore not specifically a product of the Earth – it is a product of the entire process – not the Earth alone, the entire cosmos contributes to humanity, and if of the Earth, as continuing from the earlier standpoint, he is, then humanity is not exclusively created for the Earth, but for all the stars, since humanity is created as the final goal of the cosmos.” Other animals have their niches; we have the cosmos. The universe catches itself in the act of emerging, moving, and dying because consciousness is real in it. In contrast, today’s evolutionary studies are often more modest, a deflated, thoroughly terrestrial account of creative nature and of “higher creatures,” as Darwin calls us.

Evolution, a word Darwin uses rarely, first in the sixth edition of *On the Origin of Species*, is a theory of development the target of which is the natural world. For Darwin it per-

tains to the development of plant and animal species. Descent with modification, as he more often calls it, is composed of two related operations: (1) natural selection, which is based on schedules of probabilities, and (2) a commitment to the explanatory value of origins in the struggle for life. The former answers questions about frequency. How often? How many? At what rate? According to the latter, to understand something is to understand how it emerges.

Darwin operates with a latent metaphysics, a set of implicit expectations about what is real and what is worth studying. He brings these expectations to bear on the objects he studies, the orchids, the finches and so on. But it is when the expectations, the latent metaphysics, of later generations of authorities is brought to bear on the human species that some deficiencies are plainest. To put the point the other way around: the easiest way to detect oversights in popular or crude Darwinism is, first, to locate the major insights but, second, to locate where they are, to some degree, misspent by later generations. Such Darwinism, for its many successes and its wide influence, misses the phenomena of the human in a basic way. Darwin's bodies evolve so well that he, or later expositors who attempt to remain continuous with his breakthrough, overlooks the difference between a body and a person, between matter and form, and, because of the limits of his own thinking, his theory fails to self-apply. In other words, the theory of evolution refuses to evolve. I do not mean to suggest it goes unchallenged or unchanged, that what Darwin thought in the 1800s is what contemporary evolutionary biology teaches us today. Nevertheless, his scientific successes are philosophical liabilities in the wrong hands.

The popular reconstruction of Darwin has a hold on the public imagination today. Vienna's Cardinal Christoph Schönborn writes an editorial for *The New York Times* in 2005. In it he contends that the neo-Darwinian requirement of randomness undermines traditional theological commitments. Traditionally, Catholics have held that reason helps humankind discern the purpose and design of creation and, by extension, some limited understanding of its creator. If the neo-Darwinian story is true, and the private concept of randomness is the author of the world instead of the divine, then science is incompatible with key articles of faith.

In part I think this and other such debates depend on equivocal meanings of *design*. *Design* may refer to intelligible patterns discovered and then verified in empirical data. On this interpretation the Cardinal has less to worry about. But drawing on our religious imaginations rather than our best theology, *design* may stipulate an imaginable designer, creation's puppet-master, an old man in the clouds who offers up the rest of creation to us, for our use and projects. Never mind that the bare existence of God as a transcendent explanation is, at best, an abstruse point of contention in meta-metaphysics; it is the least interesting conviction among monotheistic religions as they are lived by millions of humans. Too often, at least in popular culture, we are asked to make a choice between middling science and worse religion. So the argument between advocates of neo-Darwinian evolution and advocates of intelligent design, most of whom are creationists in sheep's clothing, depends on semantic disagreements. Parties talk past each other with little agreement about the key concepts and terms on which their disagreement depends. Our words reflect our best understanding. As long as one group fails to reflect on the way their words are prone to misunderstanding by others,

the public debate continues. Newman gets at a provocative accommodation when he writes to a friend, “It does not seem to me to follow that creation is denied because the Creator...years ago gave laws to matter...I do not [see] that the accidental evolution of organic beings is inconsistent with divine design – It is accidental to us and not to God” (77).

But not all debates can be settled with a more consistent vocabulary. Some are more thorough, more hidebound and less reducible to semantics. Such debates are unlikely to be settled in a single conference, much less a single paper. Celebrity intellectuals such as Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens – Terry Eagleton enjambes them into one, “Ditchens” – concoct a heady mix of Darwinism, scientism and fatalism. They explain human behavior in terms of body chemistry, biological instincts, anarcho-capitalism and sexual needs reflecting our evolutionary history.

Thus evolutionary studies can become a form of eliminativism, whether tacit or explicit, according to which any number of impersonal forces converge to explain the way your life and your wider culture work. Your autobiography is the result of these impersonal forces; they explain you better than your decisions do. In part this is what Darwin wanted. Species are, he says, “utterly inexplicable on the ordinary view of the independent creation of each species, but are explicable on the view of colonisation from the nearest and readiest source, together with the subsequent modification and better adaptation of the colonists to their new homes” (849). Evolution does not describe natural history as much as attempt explain it. Billions of years of cosmic expansion serve as a backdrop to our lives, and the backdrop does not disappear just so one actor in its drama can freely choose Coke or Pepsi. We are produced within a universe we cannot do without.

Hobbes uses the English Civil Wars to prove his own Ditchens point. Participants on both side of the conflict revert to brutality and mindless cruelty to hide their viciousness behind appeals to justice, rights, God’s will, each of which is a mask for the will to power. Eliminativism edges out moral decision-making by rendering it superfluous. The choice to do something looks appealing if and only if impersonal forces coordinate to render it so. Social Darwinists in the past century contend every act of charity works against the natural order by which some are weak and others strong, some poor and others rich. Many today do all manner of intellectual gymnastics to preserve the unkind choices made in the past, to defend the injustices of the status quo. Reflecting Robert Chambers’ idea of species transmutation, as evolution was known before Darwin, Alfred Lord Tennyson gives us the line about nature “red in tooth and claw.” Dawkins approves in *The Selfish Gene*: “I think [Tennyson’s phrase] sums up our modern understanding of natural selection admirably” (2). It is bald, brutal praise for the predator tenaciously willing to do what it takes to survive.

Enticed by this view of freedom and taken in by the strength it rewards, some neo-Darwinian theorists endorse survival as the criterion of success. If it lasts, it must be good. If it is still around today, it must be really good. Longevity is the arbiter both of life and of virtue. But history is “not a biological category” any more than riding a bike is a psychological one. Aristotle through to Spinoza contend happiness is the goal of life, the answer to the question of why we get up in the morning and do what we do, and when some endorse *survival* as a more persuasive alternative, I think a few short-

comings deserve to be mentioned. “Red in tooth and claw” is fair praise for a lion who manages to make it through another day on the savannah. Food is scarce; life is hard. It is what makes the *Planet Earth* documentary series so compelling to watch. But we should be uncomfortable applying this description of nature to ourselves. For us, survival is one necessary but insufficient condition to living well. It is the lowest common denominator; it is where the story begins rather than where it ends.

When neo-Darwinians characterize the universe as indifferent to our best laid plans, when they say morality is an illusion, they induce on the basis of a limited sample. Darcia Narvaez uses Darwin’s work, as well as more recent work in evolutionary studies, to show how human development involves moral growth. She encourages her readers to “rethink our systems. Adults can change cultures by developing institutions and selecting activities that minimize detachment [and] support moral heritages. We can believe that communal morality is humanity’s default, not immorality, violence or selfishness. As adults, we can use our [imagination, courage and strength] so that we can construct a society and world where all thrive” (306). She characterizes nature not as a cruel and indifferent governor but as a plastic and open-ended opportunity to become who we are on the basis of the care we show ourselves and each other via the careful choices we make.

Darwin acknowledges our species has a moral sense, and “prosocial instincts” do seem to be fixtures of our natural-historical endowment (Narvaez 4). Narvaez summarizes dreadful scientific results according to which “empathy has been decreasing in U.S. College students,” meanwhile we have “been plagued by an increase in the flaunting of social rules, more oppositional behavior and less shame for selfish behavior and even advocacy of it.” But she refuses to naturalize such descriptions. From a developmental-theoretical perspective, poor behavior does not undermine a more complete account. Unlike many other species, ours can grow old without growing up. But the fact that some fail to mature does not make it normal, natural or desirable. From the poor choices of some, it does not follow that nature favors poor behavior. Perhaps it is preferable to give up the ghost of morality, to go with the flow of accelerating decline?

Most basically the normative statement of survival of the fittest begs the question of criteria. To the degree we install natural selection as the elemental force, explaining all manner of human choices, we take away personal acts of attention, intelligence, reflection and decision that together compose responsible decision-making. To pick on Herbert Spencer’s famous phrase, what is fittest is what survives, yet what survives is what is fittest. Survival of the fittest at best means an apology for the present. After all, we are the lucky ones who made it. It leaves unanswered questions like, why isn’t the universe already totally evolved? Why doesn’t evolution occur at an infinite speed?

When we contend there is a single, maximally explanatory elementary force, we allege the uniformity of nature; we make it the result of just one thing. There is no difference between a plant species and an animal species, no difference between me and any other entity because everything belongs to or is the result of this one force. It is bad science and worse metaphysics, what logicians once called the fallacy of the vacuous contrast now dressed up like an alpha predator.



In fact, I do not think it is what Darwin intended with his work. Today it is easy to have the casual impression that his key terms and arguments and concepts would write us into existence by writing out the basic reality of our intelligence, reflection and deliberation. On the contrary, it may be that Darwin's work assures us that we are at home in the cosmos. His work is retrospective. It looks to the past and discovers no point at which nature is not creative. Species are not created independently of their habitats. Darwin was enamored of work by Alexander von Humboldt, the Romantic scientist and philosopher and explorer who attended Schelling's Berlin lectures. Perhaps we can say that Darwin uses the past, for its total lack of safety net, to rehabilitate us to our shared presence. Though Schelling's sights are set on the *ascent* of man, what Heidegger will call the destiny of being, Darwin is not an "unflinching mechanist." As Robert Richards puts it, "The sensitive reader of Darwin's works, a reader not already completely bent to early-twenty-first-century evolutionary constructions, will feel the difference between the nature that Darwin describes and the morally effete nature of modern theory" (553).

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### Evolution Doesn't Eliminate, it Illuminates: A Comment for Dr. Shoppa of St. Francis College

David C. Lahti

Three common misconceptions of biological evolution are (1) that it is random, (2) that it parasitically consumes and eliminates other sorts of explanation, and (3) that its outcomes are touted as morally or normatively good by evolutionists. Dr. Clayton Shoppa's piece "Neurobiology, Intention, and Decision" might give an impression that some evolutionary biologists today tend to think all three of these things, or any one of them. So, just as a clarification, here I would begin by mentioning that most evolutionary biologists, including Charles Darwin and Richard Dawkins (the only two mentioned in Dr. Shoppa's piece) do not hold any of these three opinions. This I will mostly just assert, because Dr. Shoppa and I and most readers will want to get quickly to figuring things out in actuality rather than discussing the opinions of people, however illustrious. But, briefly, they, by which I mean Darwin, Dawkins, and my conception of "most evolutionary biologists," instead hold that (1) natural selection, the most powerful and evident mechanism of evolution, is far from random, but is in fact an

agent of design because it ties traits and thus DNA functionally to features of the environment; (2) evolution is indeed a powerful source of explanation and challenges certain competing explanations, but leaves other sorts of explanation intact, although placing them into a broader context; and (3) the results of evolution are amoral and we must use other means to decide whether to embrace their effects on us or to fight against them. Such is the general consensus.

Evolution certainly does have a random component, though it lies not in the engine of natural selection so much as in the fuel of mutation. Still, to say that mutations are random is too short a cut. Mutations can have very predictable and deterministic causes, such as ultraviolet or other radiation and certain chemicals; they also occur through simple mistakes in copying as DNA replicates, much as any machine will make errors at a certain rate through processes that are at least somewhat understood. Moreover, the degree of error-proneness of replication can itself evolve by natural selection. What is meant by “random mutation” is not that there is a permanent inscrutability, much less a mysterious lack of causal specificity, to mutations. Rather, the particular instances of mutation are not guided by whether they are advantageous or not. A mutation is not produced “in order to” achieve a specific effect. Mutation rate in general can evolve by natural selection, but with some rather boring exceptions natural selection cannot favor the occurrence of a mutation with a particular advantageous effect; thus mutation is random with respect to its effects in the game of life. In this same sense the next card a dealer peels off is random, even though there were very specific causes of its precise position in the deck. This sort of randomness is not the sort with any metaphysical teeth. If any more important sort of randomness applies to evolution, it is not particular to evolution but is a matter for the physicists to discuss.

Evolution not only describes, but explains; and its explanations render certain others defunct, as all scientific explanations do. This pill is always hard to swallow for some who prefer certain falsified or obsolete explanations. The discovery by evolutionary biology that the function of sweet colorful fruits hanging from plants is to achieve dispersal of the plants’ offspring via hungry animals supersedes other explanations, for instance that fruit is produced by plants to benefit animals because animals are higher on the chain of being than plants. Evolutionary functional explanations tend to have a striking, penetrative or trenchant quality. They explain “why” in a way that pre-evolutionary folks typically thought (and think) possible only for metaphysical or religious explanations. Still, we need not worry that such explanations are all-consuming or eliminative of other sorts of explanation. We teach our students that evolutionary function (adaptation), evolutionary history (phylogeny), organismal development (ontogeny), and physiological processes are all separate sorts of biological explanation that cannot possibly undermine each other but contribute to an integrated understanding of “why” and “how” at different levels. And we can move from these levels out of biology into chemistry and physics in one direction, and (for some traits at least) into psychology and agency in another direction, and the rich mosaic of explanation is maintained. Even if we had a complete neuroscience, for instance, a neural explanation would not answer us as effectively as a verbal agency-centered one if we asked why a chess player moved the knight from G1 to F3. Agency is not even directly accessible to science, and so it brings us into a novel sort of purposive explanation that at most can be interdigitated with science rather than being replaced or



consumed by it. I do not mean that science cannot undermine the validity of particular such explanations – science could show that knight G1 to F3 was the wrong move. Science can also contextualize such explanations – evolution makes sense of why we play games like chess at all. But science cannot replace or eliminate the sort of explanation that an agent’s mind provides for its own decisions.

To extend the logic of levels of explanation even further, questions of ultimate purpose, such as those that occupy the authors of Dr. Shoppa’s more preferred citations (Schelling, Newman, and Schönborn) are likewise inappropriate targets of evolutionary elimination in general. Nobody would argue for the ultimate purpose of a chess game – in that game we are creating (or in Tolkien’s words subcreating) our own cosmos for fun; and our purposes are ultimate and inexorably imposed by us upon the pieces. But the possibility remains – decreasing in popularity today perhaps, but remaining nevertheless – that there are right or wrong moves for us humans in life, regardless of our own decisions on the matter and distinct from the sorts of explanations evolution or any other science provides. Again, the evolutionary and other sciences will illuminate circumstances and context, but will be silent on the big questions. Darwin knew this, as does Dawkins.

Evolutionary explanation pokes at metaphysics more than any other sort of scientific explanation – not because it is eliminativist, but because it is illuminating. It hacks away certain crude ideas. If a belief in God rests at all on a great chain of being among organic living things, special creation of human beings apart from other animals, or the immunity of our psychology from any ancestral influences, evolution will shake that metaphysic, that religion. However, evolution cannot tell us what metaphysic or religion to embrace. Evolutionary biologists worth their salt do not claim that whatever exists, is good. They do not claim that our motivations, even if products of natural selection, ought to be lauded for that reason. Or, if they do claim such things, they are not acting as evolutionary biologists when they do so, but acting as certain sorts of religious individuals, somewhat akin to Gnostics. Most of us, however, look at evolutionary explanations even of human behavior as (potentially) factual tidbits, of no more direct normative weight (no more good or bad) than factual tidbits about grasses and grapes, although of course of greater indirect relevance for our decision-making because of the subject matter.

If evolutionary biology were to teach me that humans tend to do X, or even that humans tend to think X is morally right, and why this is so, this would neither replace nor eliminate my own moral discernment. I do accept the premise of the evolutionary social sciences: my faculty of morality does not operate independently of my evolutionary history nor of the evolutionary functions of my behaviors and thoughts. Evolutionary biology even indicates and explains empirical tendencies or trendlines in human attitudes and behavior. Such explanations are exciting and tremendously useful. But they are limited in scope. In chess, few would think of a common tendency as an overwhelming reason for action; “most players move X in this situation” or “most people think that move X is best in this situation” is not useless but is not the best sort of advice either. Anyone who strives to win will attempt to be excellent, a point off the trendline. Likewise, if there is any such thing as excellence or arete in human life, then there is no saying that the final arbiter of that is any sort of historical, evolution-

ary, functional trend or effect. In some cases the mean can be golden, but in other cases the common is vulgar. One of the most fascinating things about our species, and at least as fascinating to an evolutionary biologist as to anyone else, is that we humans, not any science, decide what we are to consider good, what that means, and whether we will pursue it.



## The Importance of Practical Understanding for Altruistic Behavior

Jonathan R. Goodman

### Abstract

In this paper I present a revised view of altruistic behavior, whereby neither intention, nor effect, nor their combination, is sufficient for distinguishing altruistic behavior. On this view, a behavior is altruistic to the extent that it signals an intention to benefit another at a cost to oneself, irrespective of actual intention or effect. This understanding yields interesting but sometimes counterintuitive implications; for instance, a particular behavior intended to be altruistic that has a positive effect on the intended recipient is not necessarily altruistic. One of the features of this view is that a practical understanding of the nuances of particular social circumstances is a necessary criterion for acting altruistically; this is shown with examples of gift-giving intended to be generous that fail to qualify as altruistic on this conception. Two corollaries of this view of altruism are proposed: first, an altruistic signal is designed to elicit costly behavior from recipients and observers; second, honestly altruistic signaling is more likely to benefit the agent than deceitful signaling.

### I. Introduction

In this paper I propose a revisionist view that altruistic behavior should be understood as a signal designed to elicit beliefs and costs from others. While the accepted definitions in philosophy and biology provide sufficient criteria for a behavior qualifying as altruistic within these respective fields, neither explains how and why agents are perceived to be altruistic in any possible circumstance.

Altruism, sometimes defined in ordinary language as “selfless concern for others,” requires, on this view, that a person intends to help others without ulterior motive, for example by making an anonymous donation to a poor person or group the giver does not know. Yet it is unclear what the sufficient criteria are for behaving altruistically: one can intend to be altruistic and do nothing, one can misunderstand the etiquette in a particular culture, and so forth.

In biology, on the other hand, where the sufficient criterion for altruism is benefiting another individual at a genetic cost to oneself – for example by foregoing a meal so that someone unrelated to one can eat – it’s possible to intend to hurt others and to inadvertently help them, and yet for that action to qualify as altruistic.

Both definitions, I argue, while useful for scientific inquiry, inadequately capture the necessary criteria for one's behavior to qualify as altruistic: practical understanding of culture, or in the case of animal populations in which reciprocal altruism is observed, the correct following of socially learned rules. If an agent understands a culture well, she is able to interact with others in a way that raises the likelihood that her intentions will be perceived as altruistic. She is able to skillfully send a signal about her willingness to help others, from which observers make a judgment about her character.

Viewing altruism as a signal also links the philosophical definition with the biological: the signal itself is an effect which is determined in part by an agent's intentions. Yet while those with good practical understanding are able to successfully communicate their intentions to behave altruistically, selfish people with practical understanding are able to manipulate others using this signaling system. What we call *altruism*, I argue, is exploitable for Darwinian purposes.

## II. Altruism as intention

In philosophy, altruism is often defined by an agent's intention. Nagel (1969/1979), for example, argues that an agent is altruistic insofar as she intends to act in the interests of others. If someone makes a gift to another person intending to be generous and without ulterior motives, she is behaving altruistically, implying that intention can be a sufficient condition for altruistic behavior.

Yet if I try to make a gift to someone without considering my interests, and instead consider hers only, it does not necessarily follow that I behave altruistically. This can be demonstrated by comparing "behaved altruistically" with "was honest." If I intend to be honest and inadvertently tell someone something untrue, saying "I was being honest when I told you that untruth" implies only that I intended to be honest, or rather that I was sincere.

If, similarly, I intended to give someone a gift and mistakenly gave that person an empty box, it would be inappropriate to say "I was behaving altruistically when I gave you that empty box." Even if my interests or intentions are not called into question by the recipient of my intended gift, I would be guilty only of having altruistic intentions, though I would not have behaved altruistically.

Using the agent-focused definition of altruism, the analogy

Altruism: Altruistic behavior as Honesty: Veracity

elucidates this point. Honest or altruistic intention may be a necessary criterion for veracity or altruistic behavior, respectively, but neither is sufficient for either outcome. We distinguish "honesty" from "sincerity" in the same way that we distinguish an agent's intention to be altruistic from her behaving altruistically. This does not suggest a flaw in Nagel's definition of altruism, but rather that the intention-based definition does not provide a sufficient criterion for altruistic behavior.

Even if it is possible, furthermore, to know another agent's intentions, it is impossible to prove her intentions, so if honest/altruistic intention were sufficient for veracity/altruistic behavior, there would be no way to verify whether any action or utterance – under any circumstance – were altruistic or honest. There is always a chance that an agent is deceiving us about her intentions, showing a divorce between an agent's intention to be altruistic and the qualification of the resulting behavior as altruistic.

### III. Altruism as effect

Another common definition of altruism found, for example, in Hamilton (1972), involves only the effect of a behavior. If an agent intends to do something for her own benefit and accidentally benefits someone else, she behaves altruistically. Dawkins (1979) uses the example of a pride of lions: if a lion develops tooth decay and the rest of the pride is able to eat more, the lion is altruistic only because the effect of his behavior (not eating) is more food for the others.

Assuming this definition generalizes to other species, any agent's behavior qualifies as altruistic insofar as the actions thereof are beneficial to others to a greater degree than to oneself. If an agent's fitness could be quantified, the degree to which her fitness is reduced and others' increased determines whether a behavior is altruistic. This definition countenances a circumstance where altruism is involuntary: a person may be forced to help someone else at her own expense, a behavior which, regardless of cause, qualifies as altruistic in this sense.

The “biological” definition of altruism is therefore incompatible with the “philosophical” variety. If we substitute honesty for altruism again, it's possible for one to be accidentally honest by inadvertently telling a truth, even if others know one intends to lie. In the ordinary sense, therefore, there are cases where one might meet the criteria of altruism in the biological sense and fail to behave altruistically.

The analogy

Altruism: Altruistic behavior as Honesty: Veracity

fails if a definition of altruism as effect is used. Hamilton's definition implies that one can be forced to be altruistic, or to be altruistic accidentally; the same is not, however, true of honesty. The “effect” definition, while suitable for evolutionary biology, does not provide a sufficient criterion for altruistic behavior.

### IV. Altruism as intention and effect

The failure of the agent-focused and biological definitions of altruism to give sufficient criteria for altruistic behavior may create the illusion that combining the two definitions is sufficient. If we say an agent behaves altruistically insofar as she intends to help others without ulterior motive and she has positive effects on the intended recipient(s), all examples discussed thus far will qualify as altruistic. The box I give to someone else cannot be empty, and whether I am forced into being generous is irrelevant if I intend to be so anyway.

Yet even this combined definition does not provide necessary or sufficient criteria for altruistic behavior. I might intend to give someone a gift that benefits the recipient without behaving altruistically by violating the social norms of gift-giving. If I am under the impression that the attendees of some party are bringing small gifts, and bring a small gift myself, it is possible that I will bring a disproportionately small gift that will stand out as cheap and ungenerous.

I might also fail to understand how gift-giving, the etiquette of which depends on context, is done appropriately in a foreign culture: someone who comes to many Western cultures, for example, might be surprised that his gift of paper money is received strangely at a party where other guests bring wrapped gifts. Someone who brings expensive non-Kosher meat into a religious Jewish person's house is likely to offend that person, even if her intentions in bringing the gift are generous. In many cases gift-giving will not be considered altruistic, for example if a gift is given only out of etiquette-following; it is the intention attributed to the giver, either because of the generosity of the gift or the manner in which the gift is made, that determines whether the act of giving is altruistic.

In these situations – or in any similar example – it is possible that I both intend to act altruistically and have a positive effect on a recipient without behaving altruistically. This possibility suggests a flaw in the approach all three definitions take to providing necessary or sufficient criteria for altruistic behavior.

One must also have practical understanding of how to behave altruistically: my knowledge of appropriate execution of actions directly influences how my behavior is perceived. This is similar to Wittgenstein's (1953) discussion of understanding, where he argues that an individual does not understand a pattern only because she is able to continue it, but because of the social circumstances under which she is learning to follow the pattern. The learner understands only when her ability to follow the pattern is recognized by others, and her ability to reproduce the pattern is alone insufficient for her saying "I understand how to go on."

A similar argument is valid for altruistic behavior: an agent must understand how to apply the rules of gift-giving appropriately within a particular set of circumstances. One should bring a gift appropriate for the party one is attending: a boat is an inappropriate gift for a 10-year old's birthday party, and yet perhaps not inappropriate from one world leader to another. The person who brings expensive meat to a religious Jewish person behaves altruistically only if she recognizes the customs the person practices.

Learning the nuances of gift-giving is contingent on understanding a culture and the practical rules thereof; the claim that altruistic intention and positive effect are together necessary or sufficient for altruistic behavior is, therefore, unsound.

#### V. Altruistic behavior as a signal

The preceding arguments suggest that the criteria determining whether a behavior qualifies as altruistic are distinct from intention and effect. For a behavior to be altru-

istic, the agent must be perceived to properly execute the cultural rules associated with altruistic behavior or under particular circumstances. The agent sends a signal – a verbal or non-verbal communication about her tendency to help others – to those around her: she is altruistic in this circumstance, eliciting a reaction from others directly or indirectly. When a behavior is perceived to be altruistic, observers make a judgment about the agent’s character that may benefit her.

If altruism is viewed as a signal about one’s tendencies to bestow a benefit on others at a cost to oneself, intention and effect cease to be necessary criteria for behaving altruistically. An agent may send this signal inadvertently, intentionally, or deceitfully: while it may be required that she intends to act altruistically or that she has an altruistic effect, neither is necessary.

Frank (1988) argues that the conviction one holds about one’s honest intentions correlates positively and directly with the likelihood that others will believe one is genuine. The well-known example of tipping a waiter at a restaurant one has no intention of visiting again suggests this view is correct: there is no economically defensible reason to tip except that one believes, for whatever reason, that one should do so. Tipping well under this circumstance signals to others one’s belief that one ought to tip. While any particular instance of this behavior is unlikely to benefit one in the future, the signals sent to others may, together, determine how one’s traits are perceived in a population. This may indirectly benefit the agent if she is treated better because of her altruism.

Yet dishonest signaling of this variety is more likely to benefit the agent if executed correctly. Someone who understands her culture well is able to exploit this signaling system only for personal gain. Honest altruistic signaling may therefore be an example of the “handicap” principle described by Zahavi (1975): it may cost less to an agent to fake an altruistic signal than to communicate one genuinely, suggesting that altruism will be faked whenever someone believes she can successfully deceive.

It does not follow, however, that honest altruistic signaling is always a handicap, or that a particular agent will either always attempt to deceive or always signal honestly. Individuals differ only in the circumstances under which they will deceive, rather than in some binary sense where a particular individual always intends to deceive or be honest (Trivers, 1971). In a setting where other agents are likely to help one another – or at least where there are sufficient deterrents to prevent deception – altruistic signaling will not be a handicap. The cost of behaving altruistically may be counterbalanced by the risk of one’s intended deception being detected. Conditional honesty is therefore probably favored, though the conditions are grounded in circumstance rather than the perceived odds of reciprocity alone.

Honest signaling is, for example, less likely if one is further removed from those with whom one interacts. Consider a system in which individuals representing institutions succeed only when their work-output receives approval points from others working within the same system. Receiving many approval points for one’s work is beneficial for one’s career and institution, making points invaluable for any individual. The institutions one represents are, furthermore, competing for scarce resources, so individuals



representing these institutions have several self-interested reasons to ensure their own work receives more points than those of their colleagues. The system is regulated, but only enough to ensure that illegal activity, such as bribes, blackmail, and so forth, does not take place.

A system like this will inevitably lead to particular individuals developing methods of exploitation, including (perhaps) the formation of cooperative groups that give approval points only to one another, repeatedly giving oneself approval points wherever one can, paying money to increase one's output, and so forth.

Workers can behave altruistically or exploit one another. Granting approval points is a cost: one takes a risk when one grants points to another's work – particularly that of an unestablished worker – because it can damage one's reputation to approve of work judged by others to be poor quality. It may also damage one's status to grant approval points if one's institution loses out on resources because of one's generosity. Most importantly, individual workers may grant approval points only when they expect to receive many in return: granting approval points – an ostensibly altruistic behavior – therefore becomes such a complicated enterprise that one must make an exact calculation before deciding when and why to do so.

If a system described in this example is possible, it follows that under conditions where “altruism” can be used with sense, deceptive or exploitative behaviors will be more successful if agents are further removed from one another, and, further, that practical understanding allows one to exploit a complex system for personal gain. A researcher, due to greater odds of detection or perhaps more compassion due to proximity, may be less likely to exploit this system – for example, citations in academic literature – if she is working directly with a junior author, if she worries that her self-interest will be found out, or if she believes that one ought not to exploit the system.

#### VI. Possible counterexample

1. *“A behavior's effect necessarily has practical understanding built into it. If I fail to behave altruistically because I misunderstand conventions, I fail to meet the effect criterion.”*

This use of effect is distinct from that used by biologists, which requires only that a material cost be incurred by the agent and a material gain be accepted by the recipient. This objection requires that practical understanding falls under a behavior's effect, which only incorporates the arguments made in this paper, rather than falsifies them.

2. *“Using the signal view of altruism, one can behave altruistically inadvertently or because one is forced to. How can this definition be excluded from the objections made to the biologist's definition?”*

These problems are irrelevant to the signal definition only because the biologist's definition requires that animals cue one another rather than signal. Cueing does not imply an associated intention, so an animal might behave altruistically – using the biologist's definition – even if others know one intends not to be altruistic. The signal defi-

dition includes, though does not rely upon, an agent's intention: one cannot be altruistic where others know one is behaving self-interestedly. This implies that to send an altruistic signal, others must form a belief about the agent's intentions – though the agent's intentions are not sufficient criteria for others to form this belief.

3. *“Animals do not signal in this way if they do not display reciprocal behaviors with non-kin.”*

This paper's argument does not apply to animal populations where reciprocal altruism is not observed. If an animal's helping another can be explained only by kin selection, the animal's behavior is nepotistic, and altruism has no sense in this circumstance. The signal definition of altruism – and therefore altruism generally – is senseless in communities where reciprocal behaviors to non-kin are not found. It may be, however, that without understanding the cues animals send to one another in the contexts in which they are sent, it is impossible to determine whether an animal perceives another's behavior as altruistic.

It is essential to the signal definition of altruism that the benefits of sending this signal can outweigh the costs to an agent. If – in a population of animals where indirect reciprocity is found – an agent benefits directly or indirectly from altruistic signals sent, then the trait of sending altruistic signals will be selected for (Lahti, 2011). The signal itself is therefore more important than the cost to the agent or the benefit to the recipient; it will be selected for socially even if there are high immediate costs to an agent.

4. *“One can always deceive oneself about whether one is behaving altruistically, so every signal is potentially false.”*

It is enough, for the purposes of this paper, to say that the degree to which one believes that one is behaving out of altruism directly influences the signal sent to others. Whether one is deceiving oneself about one's intentions is therefore irrelevant.

## VII. Conclusion

This paper makes the following claims: neither intention, effect, nor intention and effect provides sufficient criteria for altruistic behavior. Whether one behaves altruistically, on the revisionist view presented in this paper, depends on the signal one sends to others: practical understanding of culture is the necessary criterion for communicating one's altruistic intentions effectively.

This signal view implies that altruism and altruistic behaviors can be exploited to benefit an agent while minimizing the cost to oneself. Practical understanding of how to behave altruistically is, therefore, a method for exploiting moral systems for Darwinian purposes. This pattern of behavior is more likely – for example with academic publishing – if one is further removed from those with whom one interacts. It should be taken as a great irony that one can abuse one's medium for publishing about morality and altruism to benefit oneself and to exclude others.

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## Comments on Goodman

### Jacob Sparks

Goodman presents objections to the standard philosophical and biological accounts of altruism. Philosophical definitions of altruism depend on intentions: one behaves altruistically when they *intend* to benefit another at a cost to themselves. Biological definitions of altruism, in contrast, depend on effects: one behaves altruistically just when they *in fact* benefit others at a cost to themselves (regardless of their intentions). Goodman proposes an alternative account: one acts altruistically when one *signals* their willingness to benefit others at a cost to themselves. Altruism, on this view, depends not on intentions or effects, but on what the action communicates. Goodman claims that this account is superior to the others: it helps to explain the importance of cultural competency for acting altruistically, it gives a clear explanation of how we can *know* when someone is acting altruistically, and shows how altruism might be explicable in Darwinian terms.

What purpose is a definition of altruism meant to serve? Most philosophers who give an account of altruism are interested in asking normative questions: Is altruism a virtue? What reasons are there to sacrifice for the sake of others? Do we have obligations to act altruistically? Biologists, in contrast, see altruism as a puzzle: how can we explain the altruistic behavior we observe in broadly Darwinian terms? Because of their different aims, philosophers and biologists usually work with different notions of ‘cost’ and ‘benefit.’ Biologists will understand these concepts in terms of reproductive success. Philosophers will understand them in terms of some theory of well-being: pleasure, preference satisfaction, objective lists, etc. The connection between these two accounts of ‘cost’ and ‘benefit’ is not clear. It may be that the pleasure etc. covaries with reproductive success or not. At any rate, given their different aims and different ways of understanding key terms like ‘cost’ and ‘benefit,’ it’s no surprise that philosophers and biologists have different working definitions of altruism.

What should we make of Goodman’s proposal in light of these different aims? If we understand altruism as Goodman recommends – as any behavior that *signals* one’s willingness to sacrifice in order to benefit others – will that lead us to a better understanding of the normative reasons to be altruistic and will it help to explain the emer-

gence of altruistic behavior?

Goodman claims to have given a *better* definition of altruism. But to see the value of his proposal for biology, we should instead see him as having introduced a distinct concept to help *explain* biological altruism. Perhaps the really puzzling behavior – sacrificing to benefit others – can be explained by the biological benefit of *signaling the willingness* to sacrifice. Such a proposal is certainly intriguing and may be part of the explanation of altruistic behavior. But we have not *replaced* the old biological concept with a new and improved version. One needs to retain that old biological concept to state the thesis that demonstrates the importance of Goodman’s signaling account.

Likewise for the philosophic question: we should not understand Goodman’s proposal as the suggestion that we abandon the concept of altruism as an intention to sacrifice for the sake of others and *replace* it with Goodman’s signaling account. Instead the suggestion must be that we can *use* the notion of *signaling a willingness to sacrifice for others* to help to explain our normative reasons to intend to be altruistic. *Signaling a willingness to sacrifice for others* gives us a reputation as an altruist. Since people tend to reciprocate, such a reputation can benefit us. Insofar as we have reasons to benefit ourselves, we have reasons to signal our willingness to sacrifice for others. And for those of us who have trouble with large scale deception, we won’t be able to signal our altruism without actually intending to be altruistic.

This might partly explain our normative reasons to intend to act altruistically. But it probably isn’t the whole story. If it were, our reasons to intend to be altruistic would be *contingent* and *instrumental*. E.g., if it turns out that we can fool others into believing our altruistic signal without actually intending to be altruistic, or if earning a reputation for altruism won’t result from our intention to act altruistically, or if such a reputation won’t benefit us, then we’ll have no reason to actually be altruistic. This seems to get the value of other people’s well being wrong. In general, our reasons to benefit others are not contingent on whether or not we ourselves will be benefitted in return.

George Price is said to have been disturbed by the implications of his famous formula. Whatever we call altruism, Price thought, is ultimately a product of some selfish evolutionary mechanism. Late in his life, Price was driven to increasingly desperate altruistic behavior, giving away all his wealth and possessions to strangers and, ultimately, taking his life.

Assume that Price was disturbed by the thought that the value of his altruism was undermined by its evolutionary origin. From one perspective, Price’s worry seems to rest on an unfortunate mistake. No fact about the origin of our altruistic behavior could have anything to do with the value of our altruistic behavior. To think otherwise is to forget the difference between behaving altruistically (Goodman’s biological altruism) and having altruistic intentions (Goodman’s philosophical altruism). It’s true that facts about the origin of our altruistic intentions can affect the value of those intentions. For instance, if you intend to act altruistically only *because* you want some reciprocity, that might impugn the value of your altruistic intention. But just because reciprocity (or selfishness genes etc.) *explains* how altruistic behavior arose, it doesn’t mean that

such behavior isn't valuable. It's important not to see philosophic altruism and biological altruism as competitor accounts of a single concept. If one did, then one couldn't avoid Price's despair.

Likewise, signaling altruism doesn't compete with philosophic or biologic altruism. Keeping them separate is essential to asking certain normative questions. Are my reasons to act altruistically (or to intend to do so) derived from my reasons to signal altruism? It's also essential for asking certain biological questions: Is the biological benefit of altruistic behavior (or intention) a function of the biological benefit of signaling altruism? These are interesting and important questions raised by Goodman's paper and they shouldn't be lost amid claims about the insufficiency of biological or philosophical accounts of altruism.

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## Moral Perception and Morally Relevant Perception

Jacob Sparks

You might bear witness to some injustice, but can you witness the injustice itself? At first glance, it's tempting to say "yes." Sometimes we see things that provoke an immediate judgement that some act is wrong just as we sometimes see things that provoke the immediate judgement that e.g. the book is red or that our friend is angry. It seems like we *perceive* the injustice just as we *perceive* the redness or the anger. Natural as that position is, some reflection might give us pause. Do we really *see* injustice? Isn't it more accurate to say that we *see* e.g. the innocent man being punished, and then we *infer* that what is happening is unjust?

The dispute, between those who think that there is a genuine kind of moral perception and those who think that no such kind of perception is possible, is the topic of this paper. Many authors dismiss the idea of moral perception with little fanfare. As an initial example, consider this passage from Sidgwick:

[T]hough probably all moral agents have experience of such particular intuitions [i.e. moral perceptions], and though they constitute a great part of the moral phenomena of most minds, comparatively few are so thoroughly satisfied with them, as not to feel a need of some further moral knowledge even from a strictly practical point of view...[S]erious doubts are aroused as to the validity of each man's particular moral judgements: and we are led to endeavour to set these doubts at rest by appealing to general rules...(Sidgwick, *Methods of Ethics*, Bk I, Chapter VIII, §3 p. 100)

There is a distinction implicit in Sidgwick's remarks between immediate moral judgements which might *arise* from perception and perceptual moral knowledge. Sidgwick rightfully grants that sometimes we find ourselves with strong moral judgements that appear to arise immediately, i.e. they do not seem to be the product of any reasoning process. We simply see what's going on and we think, "that's wrong!" But admitting that phenomenon does not mean, according to Sidgwick, that we have per-

ceptual *knowledge*. Sidgwick's reason seems to rest on his 'deductivist' model of moral knowledge. To *justify* a moral belief, we would have to introduce a general moral rule and subsume the case in question under that rule. Defenders of moral perception reject this assumption and often emphasize the Aristotelian point that there are no codifiable moral rules that have anything approaching a universal scope and that the idea that we need to find general rules to justify our particular beliefs or actions shows an impoverished understanding of the richness and complexity of the moral life.

Here is another case where the possibility of moral perception is quickly dismissed:

We don't directly detect actual instances of right and wrong in our experience...Instead, we often conclude that particular acts are wrong in virtue of some empirically detectable feature; for example, because it causes pain, involves deceit, or violates an agreement (etc.). But it is unclear how we could have empirical grounds for concluding that these features are wrong-makers given that we do not observe the actual co-instantiation of these features and wrongness. (Coons, 2010 p. 85)

Coons assumes that there is a sharp distinction between moral and non-moral properties and that while non-moral properties can be detected in experience, moral properties cannot. When he claims that pain, deceit, or being in violation of some agreement are things that we can detect empirically, but that we cannot use the senses to judge that any particular instantiation of these properties is a wrong-maker, he is implicitly relying on the claim that 'thick' moral terms<sup>1</sup> can always be decomposed into a moral and a non-moral component. We can perceive deceit, he says, but not the fact that this particular deception makes our action wrong; and hence he must think deception—even when wrong – can be identified independently of recognizing its wrongness.

Defenders of moral perception usually deny that it is possible to enact the decomposition that Coons requires. Putnam puts the point by saying that facts and values are entangled: there is not a sharp distinction between non-moral concepts and moral ones. For Putnam and others who deny the distinction, the state of mind we are in when we judge, for instance, that some act is cowardly is not analyzable into (a) judging that it involves giving into fear and (b) judging that this is wrong.<sup>2</sup> If such a decomposition were possible, then it would be possible to pick out instances of cowardly acts without sharing the evaluative standpoint which condemns them. But, according to this line of thinking, that is not plausible. It seems, instead, that one grasps instances of cowardliness in a more holistic and direct way.

Some defenders of moral perception are motivated by the inadequacy of other accounts of moral knowledge. They doubt that there are self-evident moral truths, or that reasoning from non-moral beliefs can lead to moral knowledge, or that coherence considerations are sufficient for knowing what is right and wrong. Evaluation of these last-man-standing arguments would require assessment of all the other ways people have tried to account for moral knowledge and would, in addition, require some argument against moral skepticism. This paper will instead focus on arguments for moral perception that start from reflection on the qualities needed to be a sensitive moral thinker. The moral life, it is claimed, involves much more than reasoning from a priori



principles. Even someone possessed of all the true moral principles would need certain perceptual capacities to apply those principles and to see how all the morally relevant features of the situation balance off against each other. Additionally, when we think about the experiences of mature moral agents, they don't seem to require much reasoning. The way they respond to morally loaded situations is fast and automatic – like an expert athlete or artist. A well developed perceptual capacity seems like a more reliable guide to what is right and wrong than our feeble and fallible reasoning abilities.

This position gets expressed by Tolstoy's protagonist, Konstantin Dmitrievitch Levin when, near the end of *Anna Karenina*, he reflects on how trusting the 'infallible judge in his soul,' has allowed him to manage his estate well, with sensitivity to fine distinctions that reason would have difficulty defending.

He knew he must hire laborers as cheaply as possible; but to hire men under bond, paying them in advance at less than the current rate of wages, was what he must not do, even though it was very profitable. Selling straw to the peasants in times of scarcity of provender was what he might do, even though he felt sorry for them; but the tavern and the pothouse must be put down, though they were a source of income. Felling timber must be punished as severely as possible, but he could not exact forfeits for cattle being driven onto his fields; and though it annoyed the keeper and made the peasants not afraid to graze their cattle on his land, he could not keep their cattle as a punishment...

Reasoning had brought him to doubt, and prevented him from seeing what he ought to do and what he ought not. When he did not think, but simply lived [and, we might add, *looked*], he was continually aware of the presence of an infallible judge in his soul, determining which of two possible courses of action was the better and which was the worse, and as soon as he did not act rightly, he was at once aware of it.

Levin's knowledge of how to manage his estate has a number of important features that suggest he is *perceiving* what he ought to do. His beliefs are *trustworthy*: It would be strange to say he was seeing what he ought to do if he rarely got it right. They are *immediate in a phenomenal sense*: Levin does not have the experience of concluding what he ought to do on the basis of other beliefs. Relatedly, his beliefs about how to manage his estate have a *passivity* characteristic of perception; forming these judgements is *easy* or *automatic*. His knowledge is also *immediate in a justificatory sense*: He can't give reasons for why he ought to act as he does – he just sees it. Finally, perhaps because the knowledge is immediate in these two senses, any reasoning Levin does attempt about these matters leads him into doubt and confusion.

Like Levin, many of us have the capacity to make these kinds of trustworthy immediate judgements about what we ought to do in some more or less circumscribed area of conduct. Our expertise might not be in managing country estates, but when it comes to areas where we have sufficient practice – moving about in some familiar social context, raising a child, or treating guests hospitably – we just know what to do in an easy and automatic way. Too much reasoning gets in the way. What separates those who act well in some such area from those who fail to act well does seem to be the exist-

ence of a sufficiently honed sense.

There is something clearly right about these claims, but they should not be understood to imply that there is a genuine kind of moral perception. Though Levin may require a perceptual capacity to manage his estate well, it need not be understood as a capacity to perceive moral properties. Defenders of moral perception often fail to distinguish carefully between moral perception and what I will call *morally relevant* perception. Though certain perceptual capacities are no doubt *relevant* to good moral reasoning, they do not amount to a kind of distinctively moral perception. Moreover, if there were moral perception, the capacity to perceive *morally relevant properties* would be much less important than it actually is.

There are two senses in which perception and perceptual capacities can be *relevant* for moral thought and action. Both are found in the writings of Iris Murdoch and in many of her admiring commentators.<sup>3</sup>

The first sense involves the capacity to perceive the morally relevant non-moral features of the world so that these features can enter into your deliberations. One must (1) have the proper (morally relevant) non-moral concepts, (2) have the wherewithal to *notice* when relevant non-moral features are present, (3) be disposed to *attend* to these relevant non-moral features, (4) appreciate *the relevance* of these features and, (5) be free of any biases, distortions, or distractions that might prevent those features from entering into your deliberation in the proper way.<sup>4</sup> We might say that, in this sense, perception matters because it provides the *ingredients* for moral thinking and deliberation. Suppose, for instance, that you are riding a crowded train when a person gets on who needs to sit down. If you lack the concept NEEDS TO SIT DOWN, or if, having the concept, you lack the wherewithal to notice that this person needs to sit down or if, though you notice you don't really pay any attention to the fact that she needs to sit down or if, though you pay attention you don't appreciate the fact that her need to sit down gives you a reason to offer your seat or if, appreciating that fact, you think that your comfort is more important than her need, then you won't be in a position to reason well about what you ought to do. Not all of these steps to good deliberation are properly called 'perceptual.' We wouldn't, for instance, normally call familiarity with a concept a perceptual capacity. But, as the example illustrates, morally sensitive persons often just see what's going on and then know what they ought to do.

The other sense in which perception is morally relevant is illustrated by Murdoch's case of the Mother-in-Law:

A mother, whom I shall call M, feels hostility to her daughter-in-law, whom I shall call D. M finds D...unpolished and lacking in dignity and refinement. D is inclined to be pert and familiar, insufficiently ceremonious, brusque, sometimes positively rude, always tiresomely juvenile...M feels that her son has married beneath him. Let us assume...that the mother, who is a very 'correct' person, behaves beautifully to the girl throughout...Time passes...M tells herself: 'I am old-fashioned and conventional. I may be prejudiced and narrow minded. I may be snobbish. I am certainly jealous. Let me look again.'...D is discovered to be not vulgar but refreshingly simple, not undignified but spontaneous, not noisy but gay; not tiresomely juvenile but delightfully youthful,

and so on. And as I say, *ex hypothesi*, M's outward behaviour, beautiful from the start, in no way alters. (Murdoch 1999 p. 312-3)

M doesn't come to see *new* features of D that she had previously ignored. Rather, her accomplishment is that she has come to see D *in a certain light*, or *with a loving gaze*. It is similar to the case of someone who with some effort comes to see the duckrabbit as a duck. Nothing new is seen, but there is a new way of seeing. This kind of perception, according to Murdoch, is a morally relevant *goal* and is something worth aiming at, quite apart from how it affects our actions. Sometimes Murdoch even suggests that coming to see other people and the world at large *correctly or lovingly* is the only goal of the moral life and that notion of 'exercising the will to act rightly' is a philosopher's fiction. But whether or not we accept this more extreme view, we can recognize that the mother-in-law has accomplished something morally significant and that many of us wish to accomplish similar things in our own lives.

What is important about these cases of morally relevant perception is that neither needs to be understood as the perception of moral properties. Both cases were specifically concerned with perception of certain non-moral properties, either as a precursor to moral deliberation and action or as a morally significant goal in itself. But many who defend the idea of moral perception will often cite the importance of these morally relevant kinds of perception as evidence that we can perceive moral properties. They mistakenly take the reasonable claim that perceptual capacities are relevant to moral thinking to support the much less reasonable claim that we can perceive moral properties themselves.

Take Lawrence Blum's example of John and Joan, who are riding a train together.<sup>5</sup> When a lady carrying heavy bags enters the train, Joan but not John notices her discomfort. Since Joan is able to perceive a morally relevant feature of the situation (the lady's discomfort), she is better able to make a decision about giving up her seat. She has a morally relevant perceptual capacity that John lacks. Blum puts this point by saying "a morally significant aspect of situations facing John fails to be salient to him, and this is a defect in his character." But, almost immediately, Blum reframes the point by saying that "[John] misses something of the moral reality confronting him." In a sense, this is true. John doesn't know that he ought to give up his seat. But the reason he doesn't grasp this moral fact isn't because he fails to see his obligation, it's because he fails to see the woman's distress. It's not the moral reality that John is 'missing,' it's the morally relevant reality. The perceptual capacity he lacks isn't a capacity to see the propriety of giving up his seat; it's the capacity to see that the woman needs to sit down.

In another of Blum's cases, Theresa, an administrator, is dealing with Julio, an employee, who has a painful disability that requires accommodation. Theresa fails to fully appreciate Julio's disability and his pain and therefore fails to take the needed steps to accommodate him. Blum writes that "Theresa is failing to perceive or acknowledge something morally significant." One paragraph later, however, Blum characterizes the same shortcoming of Theresa's as "the failure to be in touch with part of the moral reality." Again, we needn't understand the situation as a failure of moral perception. There is available a perfectly good explanation of Theresa's shortcoming that only

involves her failing to perceive or appreciate some morally relevant aspects of reality.

The same pattern – of moving from claims about a capacity to perceive certain (morally relevant) non-moral features to claims about a capacity to perceive the moral features themselves – recurs a number of times in the literature. Many recognize a difference in perceptual abilities between virtuous and vicious characters, or between moral experts and moral novices, and then claim that the only (or best) way to explain the difference is by differing capacities to perceive moral properties.

Werner (2014), for instance, gives a *phenomenal contrast argument* for the claim that moral properties can be part of the contents of experience. Such arguments involve imagining two very similar cases of perception that, intuitively, are phenomenally distinct. One argues that a certain property is perceptible via inference to the best explanation of the phenomenal contrast. To illustrate the pattern of argument, Werner cites an example involving the perception of the property being-a-pine-tree.

Suppose you have never seen a pine tree before and are hired to cut down all the pine trees in a grove containing trees of many different sorts. Someone points out to you which trees are pine trees. Some weeks pass, and your disposition to distinguish the pine trees from the others improves. Eventually, you can spot the pine trees immediately: they become visually salient to you...Gaining this recognitional disposition is reflected in a phenomenological difference between the visual experiences had before and those had after the recognitional disposition was fully developed. (Siegel 2010 p. 100)

Intuitively, what it's like to see a pine tree when you are a novice is different from what it's like to see the pine tree after you've had some experience in the forest. To argue that being-a-pine-tree is a property that we can perceive directly, you simply claim that what best explains the phenomenal difference is that when you are experienced, but not when you are a novice, the property being-a-pine-tree is part of the contents of your perceptual experience.

Werner applies this pattern of argument to try to show that moral properties can be part of the contents of our experiences. We are to imagine two individuals rounding a corner and encountering Harman's famous case of children burning a cat.<sup>6</sup> One of the persons, it is stipulated, is an emotionally empathic dysfunctional individual (an EEDI) called Pathos, who lacks a certain kind of affective empathy. The other is a perfectly normal person called Norma. Intuitively, the two individuals will have different phenomenal experiences on observing the scene. What explains the difference? Werner says it is the fact that Norma, but not Pathos, has the property *being bad* as part of the contents of her experience.

But why should we think it is a *moral* property figuring in the contents of experience that explains the phenomenal difference? Pathos will probably not represent the cat's pain in the same way as Norma. Even if he recognizes it in some sense, he will not *feel* it in the same way. Nor will he represent the callousness of the children in the same way as Norma. Aren't those differences sufficient to explain the phenomenal difference?

Werner, in making the case that Norma's experiential state involves the representation of badness, writes:

Norma's experiential state meets three conditions that we would standardly count as sufficient for a state's representing some property F. First...Norma has developed a disposition to be in this particular experiential state which more or less reliably tracks badness. Second, and relatedly, Norma's relevantly associated phenomenology is counterfactually correlated with badness (or at least a particular type of badness) in her local environment. Finally, Norma is disposed to form moral beliefs based on experiential states of this kind...It would appear then that we have some good preliminary reasons in favor [of the perception of moral properties] as the best explanation of the contrast in question. (Werner 2014 p. 10)

But those three conditions are *not sufficient* for Norma's experiential state to count as representing a moral property. I might get a certain feeling in my leg whenever the pressure drops and rain is likely. I might have a disposition to be in this particular experiential state that tracks rain-tomorrow, such a state might be counterfactually correlated with rain-tomorrow, and I might be disposed to form beliefs about rain-tomorrow on the basis of similar experiential states. But that doesn't show that I'm *perceiving* the property rain-tomorrow. That would be to confuse the perception of properties that are relevant for my judgement about rain-tomorrow with my perception of rain-tomorrow itself. Similarly, Werner is here confusing the perception of morally relevant properties with the perception of moral properties themselves.

Later, in considering whether or not a difference in the perception of non-moral properties (in this case being-a-cat-in-pain) can best explain the difference between Norma and Pathos, Werner writes:

The problem with this explanation is that there is no reason to suppose that Pathos fails to perceive the property of being-a-cat-in-pain if we already suppose that Norma does. And this is what would be required to generate a phenomenal contrast. As noted above, eedis are not impaired in their ability to perceive the pain or suffering of others. Nor are they impaired in their ability to perceive any other non-moral properties. Since eedis are not impaired in their ability to perceive most non-moral properties, the explanation given with respect to being-a-cat-in-pain will extend to other alternative explanations of this third sort. (Werner 2014 p. 17)

The issue here is that Werner fails to recognize the more subtle features of morally relevant perception that we listed at the beginning of this section. There is reason to suppose that being-a-cat-in-pain fails to enter into Pathos' thinking in the way we would hope, either because he fails to attend to that feature of the scenario, or because he fails to recognize the moral relevance of that property, or because his thinking is distorted in some other way. That's all consistent with Pathos being able to see that the cat is in pain. If we fully appreciate how perception can be morally relevant, we needn't assume that it's a difference in moral perception *proper* that explains the phenomenal contrast between Normal and Pathos.

As a third and final example of this pattern of argument, consider this passage from

Jennifer Wright:

Mature moral agents know, perhaps implicitly, to what they should attend in order to locate the morally relevant facts and features and then form appropriate moral responses. Although the mature moral agent is confronted with the same situation as other moral agents, often what she sees (hears, etc.) and judges on the basis of her refined moral perception is very different. So, it is only to be expected that she may see that an action is cruel or unjust while others, such as the moral novice, may not. (Wright 2008 p. 17)

Wright explicitly compares mature moral agency to expertise in other realms: just as the chess master can see the superiority of some particular position and can move accordingly or the mountain man can see subtle features of the landscape and can choose the right path, the mature moral agent can see, for instance, that the current topic of conversation is embarrassing to one of the discussants and can alter the discussion accordingly. That much is unobjectionable. But notice how, in the passage quoted, Wright begins by claiming that mature moral agents know how to locate the *morally relevant facts* and ends by claiming that the mature moral agents *see* cruelty or injustice.

One may defend the authors above by claiming that the distinction between moral and non-moral properties is not sharp, and that therefore there isn't anything wrong with slipping from the claim that mature and sensitive moral agents can perceive discomfort to the claim that they can perceive cruelty to the claim that they can perceive injustice, badness or wrongness.

There are two responses to this attempted defense. The first is to grant that there is not a sharp distinction, and to claim that even so it is a mistake to reason from the claim that we can perceive morally relevant properties to the claim that we can perceive the moral properties themselves. Consider, for instance, the difference between seeing that there are 3 books on a shelf and seeing that there are 300 books on a shelf. It is clear to me that I can see the 3 books on the shelf, but 'seeing' the 300 requires, for most people, counting them up. There may be no sharp distinction between those numbers of books that I can see directly and those that I cannot see directly, but that doesn't mean it is right to reason from the claim that I can see 3 to the claim that I can see 300.

The second response is to simply make the distinction between moral and non-moral properties sharp. In one popular formulation, moral properties are 'reason implying.' To judge that some action is wrong, for instance, implies that there is a decisive reason against doing it. To judge that some state of affairs is good implies that there is some reason to bring it about. 'Wrong' and 'good' and other terms can also be taken in a non-moral sense, to mean roughly 'what others judge to be wrong' or 'what others judge to be good.' Terms like 'cruel' or 'unjust' also have both moral and non-moral senses, depending on whether or not ascription of the property implies the existence of reasons. Once the distinction is sharpened in this way, we can say that the authors above are reasoning from the claim that one can perceive *cruelty in the non-moral sense* to the claim that one can perceive *cruelty in the moral sense*. But just because I can see the features of a situation that might imply the existence of reasons,



that doesn't mean I can literally *see* the implication itself.

The authors we've been discussing all think that an account of moral knowledge that leans heavily on a distinctively moral form of perception can better capture the experiences of mature and sensitive moral agents. What I have been trying to show is that we needn't posit a capacity to perceive moral properties to make sense of their examples. But there is one additional thing to notice about the aspirations of these authors. If it turned out that we could perceive moral properties, then our ability to perceive morally relevant properties would be much less important than it is normally taken to be. The central and least controversial way in which perception can be morally relevant is by supplying the materials we need to deliberate and act well. But, if we could just *see* the injustice of a certain action then we wouldn't need to see the features that make the action unjust. In the same way, if we could just see that it is going to rain tomorrow, we wouldn't need to be able to detect empirically all the things that are normally taken to be evidence for upcoming rain. The ability to perceive moral properties directly would provide a kind of shortcut that would make the perception of morally relevant properties extraneous.

This, I'd like to suggest, is an unwelcome result. The relationship between moral properties and the non-moral properties on which they are consequent is unlike the relationship between, for instance, a property like 'being angry' and the microphysical properties on which it is consequent. If someone were to judge that you were angry without an awareness of the microphysical properties on which your anger is consequent, that wouldn't be at all problematic. But if someone were to judge that you were, for instance, cowardly without awareness of the non-moral properties on which that moral property is consequent that *would* be problematic *even if* we grant that they really do perceive your cowardliness directly.

Maybe the best way to see why it's problematic is to think about the ways the following conversation might resolve. Someone – maybe a romantic partner – says, "You're the best." And you ask, "Why am I the best?" If they have an answer – you're so considerate, you supported me in this way, you exhibited this or that admirable quality, you did this excellent deed – then all is well and good. They know what they're talking about. But suppose they can't give a reason. They just see it. How does that feel?

Suppose Joan perceives that she ought to give up her seat on the train without noticing the elderly lady's need to sit down. Suppose Levin knows that he ought not hire men under bond, but he can't say what it is about hiring men under bond that makes it ill-advised. Something isn't right. Sensitive moral thinkers should be sensitive to a broad array of non-moral facts, and they should be able to say why various actions are right and others wrong. But the thesis that we can perceive moral properties seems to controvert this fact. No doubt perception is morally relevant in a variety of important ways, but this does not mean we perceive moral properties.

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#### Notes

1. Thick concepts are one that carry both descriptive and normative components. They are both world-guided and action-guiding. See, for instance, Williams (2011) chapters 7-8.
2. See Putnam (2002), chapter 2
3. Murdoch discusses the relevance of perception to moral philosophy in a number of essays, many of which can be found in Murdoch (1999). Among the admirers I have in mind are Antonaccio (2000). Clifton (2013), Starkey (2006) and Blum (1991),
4. I’ve abstracted these from the cases in Blum (1991).
5. Blum (1991) p. 702
6. Harman (1979) p. 4

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## Does Everything Flow? A Reply to Sparks

Jonathan R. Goodman

I thank the editors for inviting me to comment on Dr. Sparks’s essay, “Moral Perception and Morally Relevant Perception.” The essay’s central point, which the author defends effectively, is that proponents of the view that moral perception is possible are mistaking the perception of morality for the perception of morally relevant features of a particular event.

In this comment I would like, however, to question whether the distinction between moral perceptions and perceptions of morally relevant features is a necessary one, and to suggest, with a caveat, that the morally relevant features of some event are just the constituents of a moral perception.

Sparks argues that direct perception of moral properties is problematic because these perceptions may preclude people from parsing a circumstance's moral from non-moral properties. "Sensitive moral agents," as Sparks puts it, will not be able to explain why one action is right and another is wrong if these agents cannot distinguish the morally relevant features that constitute a particular moral judgment.

One factor not discussed closely in this essay, which may be relevant to this debate, is whether moral perceptions can be incorrect. If I judge, knowing all the relevant moral factors of a circumstance, that some act is unjust, it is open to question whether my judgment can be wrong. If, however, one adopts the cognitivist view that sentences expressing moral content are true or false, Sparks's complaint seems valid: the sensitive moral agent, although educated in what is good, cannot explain why a particular action is right or wrong, assuming direct moral perceptions are possible. The capacity for perceiving moral properties suggests that the non-moral features of a particular action are irrelevant when making a moral judgment.

But what if the truth-value of a sentence that may determine moral judgments is not fixed? Take, in a non-morally relevant example, Charles Travis's question of whether painting an evergreen tree's leaves gold leads to the truth or falsity of the proposition, "those leaves are gold."<sup>1</sup> In his defense of radical contextualism, Travis contends that it is possible to utter the same sentence with the same meaning on two different occasions – though on the first occasion the statement is true and on the second the statement is false. What determines the truth-value, according to Travis, is the occasion on which the statement is made.

In *Everything Flows*, Vasily Grossman describes how the Soviet State was so effective at determining how its citizens thought and behaved.<sup>2</sup> Of a particular informer who is responsible for the imprisonment of hundreds of fellow Russians, Grossman says:

The faith that lived in him was another faith: faith in the mercilessness of the chastising hand of the great Stalin. In him lived the unhesitating obedience of the believer...In some ways he disliked his dark work — except that it was his duty!... 'Remember,' his mentors used to tell him, 'that you have neither father nor mother, neither sisters nor brothers. You have only the Party.'

When, however, Stalin's reign of terror ended after his death, Grossman describes how the beliefs of those previously living in his regime adopted vastly different views about what was right or good: in the eyes of the State and the people, informants were now villains, not heroes. How should we determine the truth-value of the statement, "the informer is guilty," when uttered by a state official of the Stalinist regime on the one hand, and of the post-Stalin era on the other?

The answer would not, according to Travis, lie in whatever the informer may be guilty of, but rather how the occasion on which the sentence is uttered determines whether the statement is true or false. We can retain the same meaning for each of these words, and yet whether the phrase is uttered before or after the death of Stalin affects whether it is true.

This possibility suggests that the occasion on which a sentence is uttered may define the non-morally relevant factors from which we make moral judgments. Perceiving moral properties might then be indistinguishable from perceiving the particulars of an occasion on which a moral judgment is made: if the property is not fixed, and “flows” with the changing context, then to perceive a moral property may be to perceive the relevant factors from which a moral judgment is drawn.

If, furthermore, becoming a sensitive moral agent is part of acculturation, can we rightly judge the informer raised under Stalin’s reign who denounces those he believes are threats to his way of life? If these totalitarian beliefs were sufficiently instilled in members of the Soviet State, it seems just as plausible for an informer to rely on the “infallibility of his soul” when denouncing others as it does for Tolstoy’s Levin when he acts generously towards his serfs.

If everything flows, can a moral property be more than the union of the relevant factors at whatever time a moral judgment is made?

This argument is of course valid only if we accept the possibility that moral properties are not fixed, and that statements with moral content do not have fixed truth-values. It may nonetheless be a helpful line of thinking for Sparks to consider.

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1. Travis, C. 1997. “Pragmatics.” In B. Hale and C. Wright eds. *A Companion to the Philosophy of Language*. Oxford: Blackwell.
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## Teleological Concepts in Evolutionary Theory Applied to Human-Directed Evolution

James S. Freeman

How will moral sense, as a combination of genetically evolved and conditioned traits and behaviors and culturally evolved and conditioned beliefs, values and practices, respond to the emerging possibilities of advanced technology? What role can philosophy play in shaping the current debate, and are our present philosophical tools and discourses adequate to the task? Perhaps it is time to borrow from the recent debates over evolution within the history of science, and re-examine some philosophical views on nature and teleology to see what application they might have to a rapidly changing world. This paper looks specifically to Kant’s *Critique of Pure Judgment*, with its curious pairing of aesthetics and teleology, and the work of William James, primarily *Pragmatism* and *A Pluralistic Universe*, to provide non-theistic forms of teleology, fully supportive of evolutionary theory, that can be employed as a framework to discuss and critique current technological projects, which present existential challenges

to our definition of what it means to be human and to possess and employ moral sense. I begin and end with quotes from current news articles to try and ground the discussion in individual, “live” responses to the subject at hand, and as a gentle reminder to readers that necessary participants in the debate over human-directed evolution do not all reside within the bounds of professional academia.

A recent BBC news article asked 50 leaders in science, academia, business and government for their opinions on the greatest challenges confronting human society. One of the most striking responses came from Joel Garreau, Professor of Law, Culture, and Values at Arizona State University School of law:

I can't tell you how many times I've talked to guys working on, oh, something like massively increasing the number and power of mitochondria in human cells. And I'm like, you know that if you massively increase the amount of energy creation in cells, you're talking about changing what it means to be human, right? Are you intentionally trying to create supermen? And the answer every time is “Wow, what a fascinating question, I never thought of that.” (Lufkin, 2017)

The quote is, of course, proffered by Garreau in order to shock the reader out of complacency, and the picture of enthusiastic researchers stepping blindly towards a post-human future is unsettling. This is not to say that the whole biotechnology sector is operating in a completely unreflective manner. Almost all the other people polled in the BBC article who discussed similar issues of genetic technology and human enhancement stressed the need for “ethical reflection” and discussion to avoid abuse and negative consequences. However, not one suggested a particular method for doing so, or a terminology capable of covering such discussion. Current debates over human enhancement too often fall into polarized, even caricatured stances. Overt or disguised appeals to theological concepts of “natural limits” on human knowledge or human abilities, on the one hand, vie against secular, utilitarian claims of the near-limitless, risk-free advantages of such programs on the other.

When we examine claims for or against human genetic enhancement more closely, we invariably find teleological claims standing behind them. For instance, by pursuing human enhancement, we are overstepping our role, our purpose, as humans; we are ‘playing God without possession of divine wisdom or understanding.’ Attempts to surpass human limits, however they may be defined, are not simply hazardous or of uncertain consequences, they are existential errors. Or we claim that the purpose of science, of human society, is simply ‘to better the conditions of human life,’ however that life may be defined, or what might constitute improving it. Even seemingly facile or outrageous claims like ‘we’re developing this technology because we can’ or ‘soon we will be able to transcend the physical body entirely’ conceal teleological impulses. The exercise and increase of our abilities and the pursuit of greater knowledge are assumed to be moral goods in themselves and in furtherance of our positive human tendencies to create and to improve ourselves.

These teleological claims are, of course, inextricably bound with the general question of the teleology of the human species. What is the purpose of the human species as one species of life among many others on earth? What is our purpose as self-

conscious organisms? What is the ultimate goal of our taking control of our own evolution?

The notion that human directed evolution is already supplanting natural evolution is not new (see Donna Haraway's *Cyborg Manifesto* of 1984 and its provocative, prescient slogan: "We Are all Cyborgs Now"). But there is an increasing, and increasingly dangerous, gap between the ethical and teleological language employed by those individuals and institutions who are driving technological change, and those who articulate the social and cultural consequences of that change.

I choose to focus on the teleological writings of Immanuel Kant and William James for typical scholarly reasons – partly out of fitness for the subject at hand, and partly out of familiarity with the texts – but also because the 100 years between them neatly brackets the time of Darwin and the first, greatest impact of *On the Origin of Species*. Most particularly, the philosophical movement from Kantian idealism to Jamesian pragmatism exhibits interesting parallels with my eventual arguments about human directed evolution. This movement is, to quote Richard Rorty, a "passing from a definition of knowledge as a better fit between mind and world to one that sees knowledge as a better set of tools with which to modify our environment and shape our own definition of ourselves" (Rorty, quoted in Boffetti p. 617).

## I. Kant

Kant's *Critique of Judgment*, long considered a lesser, even tangential work compared to his other Critiques, is, in fact, being drawn upon in current debates on the teleology of biological function within the philosophy of science. It is also raised in discussions of how much, if any, space is left for teleology within natural selection and evolutionary theory, and lastly it plays a role in an ongoing tussle within post-positivism and naturalism. I will bypass much of this discourse, but I will make a brief overview sketch before diving into particulars.

The *Critique of Judgment* is an explication of what Kant terms reflective judgment: the discovery of the "universal" for the given particular. Reflective judgment comes in two types: aesthetic judgments (about the beautiful and the sublime) and teleological judgments (about purposes in natural things), and the work is comprised of two sections dealing with each separately. Philosophers have long debated why Kant put these seemingly disparate categories together, and some have argued that there is, in fact, no real, substantive philosophical connection between the two: it is a mere marriage of convenience. More recent scholarship views them as more unified, and I note a few key points of connection made by these authors:

1. It can be argued that Kant treated aesthetics first because it sets forth his views on human artifacts, which he later draws heavily upon by analogizing and contrasting between human artifacts and natural organisms in setting up his teleological system. That analogy appears to exert a strong influence still on contemporary attempts to explain function and self-regulation in living organisms.
2. The overarching reason for the structure of the *Critique of Judgment*, according to Zammito and others, is not arbitrary, but an attempt at a "critical" reconciliation of human [moral] obligation, and its implicated freedom, with the



lawfulness of phenomenal nature, the unity of its ‘order’, as the locus in which man was to act out this obligation.” (Zamitto p. 754-55)

3. Therefore, teleological claims about both individual organisms and nature as a whole are, for Kant, intimately connected to human morality (he famously claims the human species as the sole final purpose of nature, but only as a moral being exhibiting free will), but also to human creativity and the feelings of beauty and the sublime.

It is definitely not a mere coincidence that Kant begins his critique of teleological judgment with a discussion of the physiology of birds and how their wings, hollow bones, and tails are adapted for flight. Here he already pushes the analogy between artifact and organism to set up claims about functionality directed towards a certain purpose. In this analogy, fitness of an organ or organism is recognized by means of a form of aesthetic judgment: we recognize functionality in the same way we recognize the beauty of a work of art: through the quality of harmony, the relation of parts to a whole, composition as a vehicle that carries apprehensible meaning. However, he distinguishes living organisms from artifacts by pointing to their abilities for reproduction, growth, and self-regulation as a system of integrated parts (Quarfood p. 738).

We take note of these abilities through sensation, through observed experience. But this gives us no ground for ascertaining purpose beyond functionality. Kant characterizes a living organism as something that exhibits a unique kind of causality – “as a thing that is both cause and effect of itself” (Kant, *Critique of Judgment* 5:370, quoted in Zamitto, p. 756). He adds that, while we can think of this kind of causality without contradiction, we cannot bring it under concepts of the understanding, that is, we can recognize it, without being able to explain it (*Id.*). In Kant’s view, the vast contingencies involved in the development of a complex organism defied any explanation based on mechanical principles of causation – please note that his view was consonant with then current theories of biology.

Because of this limitation, Kant focused on natural teleology as, first and foremost, part of the reflective power of judgment: a “transcendental rule necessary for our cognition of organisms as organisms, as organized and self-organizing” (Steigerwald, p. 716). This *a priori* rule is constitutive of biology as a science that examines living organisms as natural purposes, but it is a heuristic principle only – it guides our investigations into natural organisms, it does not provide for a final cause or purpose of life as a whole. “It is thus by moving between the observation of particular natural objects and the concept of purpose as a concept of reason that the reflecting power of judgment arrives at the concept of natural purpose and the notion of intrinsic purposiveness” (*Id.* p. 719). Accordingly, the concept of the purposiveness [*Zweckmässigkeit*] of organisms, their ‘harmony with the character of things only possible through purposes’ (*Id.* p. 720, quoting the Introduction to the *Critique of Judgment*), is a product of the principle of purposiveness, the assumption that nature will be purposive for our intellect. According to some modern commentators, Kant turned this apparent contradiction – that all material things must be understood as products of mechanical laws, but that living organisms cannot be so understood as merely mechanical products – into a critique of contemporary metaphysics, and also of the limits of human understanding (*Id.* p. 729-30).

Now, to bring Kant’s teleology back to the analogy with art and human creation: in his system, teleological investigation of natural organisms is an aesthetic judgment governed by concepts of fitness and harmony between parts and a larger whole. It is a creative act of the imagination, not an application of formal reason, though it is shaped and bound by *a priori* concepts of reason, as discussed previously.

As argued above, Kant strongly criticized attempts to move beyond investigations of natural purposes to speculations about ultimate purposes – as Steigerwald puts it, “teleology cannot produce a theology” (*Id.* p. 732). There is no *scientific* justification for such speculation: theological speculations are out of bounds within Kantian philosophy. On the flip side of this coin, secular teleology faces the danger of taking an anthropocentric view of nature – even Kant is not immune to this critique in his positioning of human beings as free moral agents as the final purpose of nature.

The main point I wish to make here is that these formal philosophical objections are to a large extent obliterated, at least in pragmatic terms, by human-directed genetic enhancement: we are in a very real sense becoming at once the cause and effect of our own efforts to change our genetic code, but as organisms within the system of nature. We are apprehensible and observable as agents in a way that is not possible with other living organisms.

However, the collapse of this central pillar of Kant’s teleological system does not render it incapable of making useful contributions to present day debates over human directed evolution. On the contrary, the Kantian notion that we must infer the purposiveness of nature in order to make sense of it, while at the same time realizing that the limits of the human intellect places the discovery of the ultimate purposiveness of nature into, at best, a hypothetical distant future, as setting the stage for the Jamesian, pragmatic concept of teleology. That two such disparate thinkers would both rely on cautious, even humble conceptions of the goals of human investigations as asymptotic, likely never to reach perfect understanding, is less surprising if one is aware of the lines of connection between them (*See, e.g.,* Murray Murphey’s well known essay *Kant’s Children: the Cambridge Pragmatists*, discussed further below).

As a parenthetical transition, it might seem that the sketch of natural teleology I have elaborated so far is directly at odds with Evelyn Fox Keller’s well-known essay *Ecosystems, Organisms and Machines*, the thesis of which is to drop discussions of intentionality in favor of agency. However, her discussion of self-organizing systems, which she actually grounds in Kant’s discussions of organisms, is a deliberate attempt to bypass cruder forms of teleology, namely, an external creator or causal principle, while still asserting purposiveness through the action of agency, whether human or animal, in the sense of extending their abilities through modification of their surrounding environment.

I’m especially interested in her final paragraph, where she makes the claim “that the most interesting kinds of self-organizing systems are those that require the participation and interaction of many different kinds of selves,” despite her well-founded fears that human agency has a potential for destabilization far beyond other organisms. My reasons for this interest will be made clear in my discussion of James.

## II. James

We now move from Königsberg at the close of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century to Boston at the opening of the 20<sup>th</sup>. The impact of Darwin on the social sciences was at its height while William James was constructing his version of pragmatism – indeed, Philip Wiener wrote a book length study of the role of evolution on the development of pragmatism itself (*Evolution and the Founders of Pragmatism*, 1949).

Henry Levenson's introduction to the 1996 edition of *A Pluralistic Universe* similarly sees a philosophical reaction to evolutionary theory as one of James' main points. He quotes, "the vaster vistas which scientific evolutionism has opened and the rising tide of social democratic ideas, have changed the type of our imagination" (*PU* p. 30).

Yet despite the huge scientific gap between them, there are solid connections between Kant and James. Murray J. Murphey, who drew upon Wiener's book in his influential article *Kant's Children*, claimed "Cambridge pragmatism was, and is, more indebted to Kant than to any other single philosopher." Murphey's argument is that the pragmatic conception of meaning as simply the end result of inquiry concerning an object that results in a habit of action, in Charles Pierce's famous definition, while appearing to be aligned with empiricism and the scientific method which grew out of it, actually began with Pierce's rejection of the empiricist claim of the origin of knowledge in sensation. Instead, Pierce relied on his interpretation of Kant's transcendental unity of apperception – the ability to tie 'all appearances' together into 'one experience' – except that Pierce and the pragmatists emphasized the origin of transcendental apperception not in a divine mind, but in an actual human community of thinkers and actors. Pierce later totally revised his theory of inquiry, but by then James had picked up the ball and run with it. James' pragmatism, however, was more radically empirical than Pierce's. (*cf.* James' discussion of truth in *Pragmatism* p. 97-99).

That being said, James was a far less systematic philosopher than Kant, and one must pick out passages among his works and connect disparate threads to arrive at anything like a coherent account. For the sake of brevity, I'll restrict myself to connecting a few dots.

First, as discussed above, pragmatism's epistemology is future oriented – truth is the end of inquiry that results in a habit of action – hence it is teleological in character: action deliberately directed towards a goal. Second, inquiry into truth is also a communal process that begins in the historical past, but extends into the indefinite future. The commonalities with Kant's discussion of purposiveness in nature now appear in sharper relief.

Third, James developed his radical pragmatism in part in order to reconcile empiricism and its materialistic world view with what he called the "religious demands of human beings." The reason was not to preserve dogma, or to privilege theologically based forms of knowledge. Rather, it was in service to the pragmatic quest for truth as a means of improving human life.

In arguing against the materialism of Spencer and the social Darwinists, he pointed out that Spencer himself equated theistic notions of spirit with the then-modern conceptions of matter and energy: "[b]oth terms...are but symbols, pointing to that one

unknowable reality in which their oppositions case” (*Pragmatism* p. 50). In other words, neither materialism nor theism could provide an adequate foundation for truth as extrinsic to human endeavors, they were simply alternative descriptions of a claim that pragmatism rejected *ab initio*.

James therefore argued that the difference between theism and materialism, pragmatically considered, lies not in the superiority of one over the other in providing a teleological grounding for the universe, but in the difference either hypothesis makes in the direction of future efforts. A theistic impulse has real, concrete truth value because it gives credence to hope for the future, both individually and communally.

*If theological ideas prove to have a value for concrete life, they will be true, for pragmatism, in the sense of being good for so much. For how much more they are true, will depend entirely on their relations to the other truths that also have to be acknowledged.* (*Pragmatism*, p. 40-41, italics in original)

James’ discussion of the argument for design in nature, post Darwin, declares that it has lost all value in terms of proving the existence or describing a designer – from a pragmatic point of view, the universe is the same whether it was designed or evolved by chance, the only value, again, lies in the idea of a designer as a *promise* of hope, of better things in the future.

Based on this approach, James critiqued Spencer’s materialist conception of mind as being severely limited – comprised solely of rational cognition – and leaving out sentiments, aesthetic judgments, and emotions (Remarks on Spencer in *Essays in Philosophy* p. 8-9). This critique still rings true today in regard to much of the language of pro-genetic enhancement. James’ own criterion for choice of theories was based on giving the largest sum of satisfactions, *taste included* (*Pragmatism* p. 104). James argued elsewhere that “the disinterested love of information, and still more the love of consistency in thought (that true scientific *oestrus*) and the ideal fealty to Truth (with a capital T), are all so many particular forms of aesthetic interest” (James, *Essays in Philosophy*, p. 20-21). The teleology of scientific inquiry and technological development is, for James, as for Kant, based on aesthetic judgments, directing the mind to what it finds harmonious, ordered, and well-suited for a particular purpose.

This is not the limit to James’ remarks on teleology, however. A bit later in *Pragmatism*, he raises the topic of *unity of purpose*, a phrase that is not explicitly identified as teleological, but bears a noted resemblance to Kant’s concept of intrinsic purposiveness in nature. After pointing out the multiplicity of human systems and activities, each with their own purposes, either connecting or conflicting with one another, but over time tends towards greater complexity and difference from earlier purposes – a strikingly evolutionary turn of phrase – he arrives at the conclusion that “everything makes strongly for the view that our world is incompletely unified teleologically and is still trying to get its unification better organized” (James, *Pragmatism*, Lecture IV, p. 77).

Human teleology is therefore evolving and pluralistic, rather than original, fixed and singular, and requires the participation of humans as actual agents as well as constituent members of the natural world. This conception provides an alternative solution to

Kant’s antinomy of judgment and its inability to move from the observation of purposiveness in individual organisms to a coherent account of purposiveness in nature as a whole – there is no universal coherence at present, and any future movement towards coherence requires human agency as a participating principle within the system of nature – which is also consonant with Fox Keller’s argument for agency.

The ramifications of a pluralistic teleological scheme for debates about human directed evolution are numerous, and I will only sketch out a small number before drawing to a conclusion. At the outset, I would argue that pluralistic conceptions of human nature should be assumed to be part of moral sense, and should be understood as having pragmatic value.

As a way of employing this pluralistic teleological scheme to clarify the current debate, I would start with the notion that competing claims for or against the advancement of human directed evolution should first be examined to determine their teleological stance. These embedded teleological claims should then be judged, not by attempting to evaluate or compare their claims to truth, based as they are on distinct, incommensurable theistic or quasi-materialistic hypotheses. Instead, they should be judged according to their power to actuate our deepest hopes and aspirations, to marshal actual human communities towards a fuller discourse on what it means to be human, and what “bettering human life” might actually look like. Such a pragmatic discourse would actively work to incorporate multiple viewpoints, even sharply contradictory ones, rather than seeking to silence the other side or reduce their arguments to logical or spiritual impossibilities.

A pragmatic approach to teleology in this sense allows for the opening up of a “neutral ground” where theologically-grounded arguments concerning human directed evolution may be accepted for their pragmatic value, without accepting the dogmatic framework that surrounds them. Similarly, it removes secular arguments from any position of privilege based on appeals to science as the sole arbiter of truth in modern society, and instead forces them to articulate their “cash value” in terms of concrete benefits to actual human communities.

Failure to engage positively diverse, multiple views and construct a full and adequately complex portrait of the potentials and risks of human directed evolution comes with extremely dangerous consequences. To circle back to Joel Garreau: “When the ground moves beneath her feet, any sane primate looks for something apparently solid to hold onto. Anybody with apparently simple stories about what’s going on, forcefully told, \*will\* get attention” (Lufkin 2017). There is no guarantee that the debate over human directed evolution will not become hijacked by one side or another for short term political gain, but I would argue that a pragmatic, pluralistic framework lessens that possibility.

I conclude with a passage from a recent op-ed by a woman who is neither a scientist nor an academic, but who has critically important contributions to the debate. Sheila Black is a poet and artist who, as a Little Person, is contemplating the end of the genetic illness which causes her condition and appearance, and the consequences for her, her family, and for humans in general:

I do not mean to say that the prospect of a cure for XLH [the genetic illness] is a bad thing, only that for people like me, it is a complex one. Certainly, the potential benefits to both individuals and society are real: less struggle and suffering for individuals and families, especially those not financially and socially equipped to overcome them, and perhaps the chance to direct medical attention and limited resources to more life-threatening and debilitating conditions.

But that does not change the fact that to be human often entails finding ways to make what appears a disadvantage a point of strength or pride. XLH does not shorten life-span. It makes walking difficult, and we XLHers suffer more aches and pains than most people. But the main reason a cure is deemed necessary is that we look different. And this is why I hesitate and wonder: Who would I be without my XLH? Who would my children be?

I can't predict where Crispr and the like will lead, but I do know that ethics and lived experience must be important guides, and that the very knowledge contained in the disability community is perhaps the best place to start, for who better to consider such questions than those of us who have lived with being different? (*New York Times*, p. SR6, May 31, 2017).

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Design and the Future Cosmopolis:  
Response to James Freeman's "Teleological Concepts in  
Evolutionary Theory Applied to Human-Directed Evolution."

Clayton Shoppa

James Freeman uses teleology to wonder about technology's risks. A morally ambivalent phenomenon, technology enables as well as disables, bringing us closer while separating us further. In what follows I will widen the historical bookends Freeman uses and assess the conclusions he endorses.

Freeman looks to Kant for a teleology of nature. Something is purposive when its nature may only be explained by the concept of causality. Kant invokes classical philosophy's metaphysical vocabulary to make his point, permitting in these cases the judgment that effective causes are the effect of final causes. Purposiveness unifies the subjective and the objective. The human mind trades in concepts, purposiveness among them. Kant concedes it appears to us as if nature has a purpose, but, because of the epistemic restrictions put forward by critical philosophy, we must be careful to deflate our thinking and curtail naturalism's ambitions. Natural entities, and here think of a migrating bird, appear to have purposes insofar as we cannot explain them without appeal to some reason, but the reason is our contribution to the explanation and not nature's. Kant permits us to speak of nature's purposiveness, a nominalized adjective, but prohibits any inference about its purpose. Hegel, writing later, will contend reason is the enacted self-selection of this subjective-objective unity. When the concept thinks itself, per the highest-order meta-adventure of *Science of Logic*, the concept's freedom and its life are developments of its purpose. Kant restricts concepts to our finite minds. But Hegel refuses this restriction. For him it is valid and sound and philosophically meaningful to speak non-metaphorically of nature's purpose as much as it is to speak of our own. Hegel thinks the universe thinks. In fact, he's sure it does.

Notwithstanding these differences, both for Kant and for Hegel the operation of reason and the cooperation of human decision-making in history depend on shared purposes that are deliberately and rationally self-selected. This reciprocal structure is important for Freeman since his focus is the self-selection of the future, the intelligent design of what is to come. Freeman challenges us to consider the ethical implications of our ongoing replacement of accident with responsible decision, of evolution with engineering. The former pair we inherit from the natural world that produced us, the latter we contribute back to it and thus to future generations, recycling the structure.

Freeman next looks to William James for a teleology of decision. In *The Varieties of Religious Experience* James associates Hegel with the monism and mysticism by which all distinctions, inside and outside, knower and known, real and ideal, self and other, spirit and nature, are overcome. Like Kant and Hegel, James wants to restore the primacy of experience. All three work against the dogmatism of their days. All three, of course, understand experience differently. When he was young, Kant thought experience always referred to the experience of irreducible particularity. By the first critique, experience comes to refer to a manifold conditioned by synthetic judgments.

Experience and its objects have the same preconditions. This is the momentous discovery Kant calls a second Copernican revolution. Hegel rejects Hume's empiricism, which consists of raw extroversion, at the beginning of *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. Instead, Hegel's experience is the road, though windy, full of false starts and switch-backs, to science. James disavows the metaphysical scaffolding on which he believes his predecessors' conclusions depend. Pragmatism, local and site-specific, dismisses and deflates all of this, rendering "x is good" as "x works well." Taking up James's commitments is what grounds Freeman's praise for pluralism. When teleology is plural, when the ends are multiple, we get an alternative to metaphysically monological substance. Thus Freeman prefers Hegel or James to Spinoza, or a certain interpretation of Spinoza, for Spinoza's philosophy as pure position, all substance no subject, works against the pragmatic values Freeman prescribes to help us along our road.

The article's major strengths are the methodological insights of its conclusion. Freeman imagines and recommends thorough public debate about the future we will either inherit by hapless accident or engineer by careful purpose. Present decisions have far-reaching consequences. William James's brother Henry gets at the shortcomings of the accidental inheritance view in the first volume of *The Wings of the Dove*, when he writes of "people [...] in motion, on such a scale and with such an air of being equipped for a profitable journey, only to break down [and] stretch themselves in the wayside dust without a reason[.]"

Human-directed evolution deserves a careful debate. Planning is a prudent first step before high-stakes decisions are made, if we are to avoid the wayside dust. But if platitudes praising critical conversation are insufficient, if knowledge of the future remains unavailable, if best guesses, probabilities and keen foresight are our best tools to manage the upcoming public hearing, what can philosophy contribute? First, as Freeman acknowledges, it can contribute order, collecting, organizing and, more controversially, explicitly ranking views according to consistent standards. Second, as Freeman implies, it can promote a wider historical view on these matters, for transience and immediacy are truncated perspectives to talk about evolution even or especially on pragmatic grounds. But third, he prescribes a "neutral ground" as a medium for claims' assessments. I am not so sure about this purported neutrality. What is needed instead is an interrogative ground. Fox Keller's first published work shows how, for example, Barbara McClintock is suspicious of objectivity as a snapshot taken afield of what is to be understood and endorses instead an engaged feeling for the organism. Objectivity is not what happens when we subtract subjectivity. Pragmatists do not have to make a straw man of the truth to win compelling conclusions. Responsible pragmatism depends on what Kenji Yoshino calls reason-forcing conversations, in other words, sincere and meaningful questions, more than it does a neutral view from nowhere.



## From Leviathan to Saint: When and Why Did Our Feelings About Whales Change?

Kathleen A. Nolan

*In the Heart of the Sea: The Tragedy of the Whaleship Essex* by Nathaniel Philbrick is the true story of a sperm whale that sank a whaleship in 1820. In contrast, Farley Mowat writes, in *A Whale for the Killing*, of how in the 1960's, well after the fall of the whaling industry, people in Newfoundland are taking great pleasure in taking gunshots at, and eventually killing, a whale that is trapped in the ice. Mowat wrote this book in 1972, the same year that Greenpeace and the U.S. Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972 came into existence. He updated his version of the book in 2005. This paper will explore attitudes of people about whales before and after this “paradigm shift” of thinking about whales as being “evil boat-sinkers” (*Moby Dick* was based on the Tragedy of the Essex story) to revered animals. The cultural evolution of this thought process was most likely accelerated by our loss of dependence for whale oil for lighting, and ambergris for perfume, as well as the tumultuous population decline of these animals.

Whales are marine mammals. We have gone from a society that depended on whales, especially the sperm whale, for its superior oil to one in which whales are revered for their graceful majesty in all but a few countries that still hunt whales (Japan, Norway, and Iceland). Philbrick (2000) describes the true story of a sperm whale that sank a whaleship in 1820, and Herman Melville, who had journeyed on whaleboats, wrote *Moby Dick* (fiction) in 1851, based on this story. “The Sperm Whale is in some cases sufficiently powerful, knowing, and judiciously malicious, as with direct aforethought to stave in, utterly destroy, and sink a large ship; and what is more, the Sperm Whale has done it,” says Ishmael; he then goes on to relate the story of “The Essex” with Capt. Pollard in 1820 (Melville 248). Melville gives a short “history” of the whale in literature, “The whale no famous author, and whaling no famous chronicler? Who wrote the first account of our Leviathan? Who but mighty Job! And who composed the first narrative of a whaling-voyage? Who but no less a prince than Alfred the Great, who, with his own royal pen, took down the words from Other, the Norwegian whale-hunter of those times!” (Melville 151).

Ishmael describes all sorts of whales, from right whales (baleen) to fin whales, and talks about whether or not they are “monsters” and whether they have teeth (sperm whales) or baleen (right whales – so named because they were the “right whale to hunt”); “The Fin-Back is not gregarious. He seems a whale-hater, as some men are man-haters. Very shy; always going solitary; unexpectedly rising to the surface in the remotest and most sullen waters; his straight and single lofty jet rising like a tall misanthropic spear upon a barren plain; gifted with such wondrous power and velocity in swimming, as to defy all present pursuit from man; this leviathan seems the banished and unconquerable Cain of his race, bearing for his mark that style upon his back” (Melville 183).

Since whaling was dangerous but could bring in much cash it could really be placed almost in the category of being a soldier at war. Ishmael says, “No dignity in whaling? The dignity of our calling the very heavens attest. Cetus is a constellation in the South! No more! Drive down your hat in presence of the Czar, and take it off to Queequeg! No more! I know a man that, in his lifetime, has taken three hundred and fifty whales. I account that man more honorable than that great captain of antiquity who boasted of taking as many walled towns” (Melville 152). And, “Then here I prospectively ascribe all the honor and the glory to whaling; for a whale-ship was my Yale College and my Harvard” (Melville 153). In Nantucket, whaling was, “...a bloodlust and pride that bound every mother, father, and child in a clannish commitment to the hunt. There was a secret society of young women on the island whose members pledged to marry only men who had already killed a whale (Philbrick 13).

Throughout *Moby Dick* we see many phrases that depict the whale as a monster. Ishmael said (for his reason to embark on a whaling adventure), “Chief among these motives was the overwhelming idea of the great whale himself. Such a portentous and mysterious monster roused all my curiosity” (Melville 48). And, “For so revoltingly appalling was the White Whale’s aspect...” (Melville 590).

Captain Ahab, who lost one leg in an encounter with a white sperm whale, is determined to find and kill whom he called “Moby Dick.” He incites his crew and motivates them with the promise of gold. “Whosoever of ye raises me a white-headed whale with a wrinkled brow and a crooked jaw; whosoever of ye raises me that white-headed whale, with three holes punctured in his starboard fluke – look ye, whosoever of ye raises me that same white whale, he shall have this gold ounce, my boys!” (Melville 202). He becomes more vengeful as the book moves on: “He piled upon the whale’s white hump the sum of all the general rage and hate felt by his whole race from Adam down; and then, as if his chest had been a mortar, he burst his hot heart’s shell upon it” (Melville 225). And, “Aye, breach your last to the sun, Moby-Dick!” cried Ahab, “thy hour and thy harpoon are at hand! – Down!” (Melville 597), and “Towards thee I roll, thou all-destroying but unconquering whale; to the last I grapple with thee; from hell’s heart I stab at thee; for hate’s sake I spit my last breath at thee” (Melville 612). The crew members were also “infected” by Ahab’s vengeful attitude. Ishmael says, “A wild, mystical, sympathetical feeling was in me; Ahab’s quenchless feud seemed mine. With greedy ears I learned the history of that murderous monster against whom I and all the others had taken our oaths of violence and revenge” (Melville 219). There is an excitement about the hunt that builds throughout the book,

A captain stood upon the deck  
A spyglass in his hand  
A viewing of those gallant whales  
That blew at every strand.  
Oh, your tubs in your boats, my boys,  
And by your braces stand,  
And we’ll have one of those fine whales,  
Hand, boys, over hand!  
So, be cheery, my lads!  
May your hearts never fail!

While the bold harpooner is striking the whale!  
MATE'S VOICE FROM THE QUARTER-DECK (Melville 212-213).

Even though the sperm whale is seen as a monster, whalers experienced a sense of awe at its tremendous size and grace. "But in that great Sperm Whale, this high and mighty god-like dignity inherent in the brow is so immensely amplified, that gazing on it, in that full front view, you feel the Deity and the dread powers more forcibly than in beholding any other object in living nature" (Melville 389). And, "He plays on the ocean as if it were a hearth. But still you see his power in his play. The broad palms of his tail are flirited high into the air; then smiting the surface, the thunderous concussion resounds for miles" (Melville 419). Also, "A gentle joyousness – a mighty mildness of repose in swiftiness, invested the gliding whale. Not the white bull Jupiter swimming away with ravished Europa clinging to his graceful horns; his lovely, leering eyes sideways intent upon the maid; with smooth bewitching fleetness, rippling straight for the nuptial bower in Crete; not Jove, not that great majesty Supreme! did surpass the glorified White Whale as he so divinely swam" (Melville 586). Furthermore, "Crushed thirty feet upwards, the waters flashed for an instant like heaps of fountains, then brokenly sank in a shower of flakes, leaving the circling surface creamed like new milk round the marble trunk of the whale" (Melville 607).

And this seems to sum up the impact of Melville's writing where he combines terror and awe, along with a comparison to natural wonders. "The appalling beauty of the vast milky mass, that lit up by a horizontal spangling sun, shifted and glistened like a living opal in the blue morning sea" (Melville 302). And also, "And thus, through the serene tranquilities of the tropical sea, among waves whose hand-clappings were suspended by exceeding rapture, Moby-Dick moved on, still withholding from sight the full terrors of his submerged trunk, entirely hiding the wrenched hideousness of his jaw. But soon the fore part of him slowly rose from the water; for an instant his whole marbleized body formed a high arch, like Virginia's Natural Bridge, and warningly waving his bannered flukes in the air, the grand god revealed himself, sounded, and went out of sight" (Melville 587). And, "...white, glistening teeth, floating up from the undiscoverable bottom. It was Moby-Dick's open mouth and scrolled jaw; his vast, shadowed bulk still blending with the blue of the sea. The glittering mouth yawned beneath the boat like an open-doored marble tomb..." (Melville 588). As well, "Rising with his utmost velocity from the furthest depths, the Sperm Whale thus booms his entire bulk into the pure element of air, and piling up a mountain of dazzling foam...in some cases, this breaching is his act of defiance" (Melville 596).

Also, the female whales are recognized: "But far beneath this wondrous world upon the surface, another and still stranger world met our eyes as we gazed over the side. For, suspended in those watery vaults, floated the forms of the nursing mothers of the whales, and those that by their enormous girth seemed shortly to become mothers" (Melville 429). And, "Say you strike a forty-barrel-bull – poor devil! all his comrades quit him. But strike a member of the harem school, and her companions swim around her with every token of concern, sometimes lingering so near her and so long, as themselves to fall a prey" (Melville 437). Philbrick noted, "The sperm whales' network of female-based family units resembled, to a remarkable extent, the community the whalers had left back home on Nantucket" (Philbrick 71).

Melville also recognized the enormous size of a sperm whale with, “I say, a Sperm Whale of the largest magnitude, between eighty-five and ninety feet in length, and something less than forty feet in its fullest circumference, such a whale will weigh at least ninety tons; so that, reckoning thirteen men to a ton, he would considerably outweigh the combined population of a whole village of one thousand one hundred inhabitants” (Melville 494). Also, “But in that great Sperm Whale, this high and mighty god-like dignity inherent in the brow is so immensely amplified, that gazing on it, in that full front view, you feel the Deity and the dread powers more forcibly than in beholding any other object in living nature” (Melville 389).

The goriness and bloodiness of the whole whaling operation is described in graphic detail by both Philbrick and Melville. “Its spout transformed into a fifteen- to twenty-foot geyser of gore that prompted the mate to shout, ‘Chimney’s afire!’ As the blood rained down on them, the men took up the oars and backed furiously away, then paused to watch as the whale went into what was known as its flurry.” Then, “The whale fell motionless and silent, a giant black corpse floating fin-up in a slick of its own blood and vomit” (Philbrick 54). “There is a murderous appearance about the blood-stained decks, and the huge masses of flesh and blubber lying here and there, and a ferocity in the looks of the men, heightened by the red, fierce glare of the fires” (Philbrick 56-57). Philbrick suggested that “The repetitious nature of the work desensitized the men to the awesome wonder of the whale” (Philbrick 65).

Captain Ahab said, “And this is what ye have shipped for, men! to chase that white whale on both sides of land, and over all sides of the earth, till he spouts black blood and rolls fin out” (Melville 204). About a whale that was killed (not Moby Dick), “The red tide now poured from all sides of the monster like brooks down a hill. His tormented body rolled not in brine but in blood, which bubbled and seethed for furlongs behind in their wake. The slanting sun playing upon this crimson pond in the sea, sent back its reflection into every face, so that they all glowed to each other like red men” (Melville 329). Melville makes allusions to gory biblical scenes, “Moby-Dick swam swiftly round and round the wrecked crew; sideways churning the water in his vengeful wake, as if lashing himself up to still another and more deadly assault. The sight of the splintered boat seemed to madden him, as the blood of grapes and mulberries cast before Antiochus’s elephants in the book of Maccabees” (Melville 589).

Melville does also attribute vengeance to Moby Dick in, “Retribution, swift vengeance, eternal malice were in his whole aspect, and spite of all that mortal man could do, the solid white buttress of his forehead smote the ship’s starboard bow, till men and timbers reeled” (Melville 612).

Even though Captain Ahab thought that the whale was personally “out to get him,” others recognized that the animal might just be acting from instinct, and did not attribute a great intelligence to these animals. “Vengeance on a dumb brute!” cried Starbuck, “that simply smote thee from blindest instinct! Madness! To be enraged with a dumb thing, Captain Ahab, seems blasphemous.”

Melville also points out the usefulness of several of the whale parts, especially the



spermaceti or whale oil and the ambergris, from which perfume is made. “You must go to New Bedford to see a brilliant wedding; for, they say, they have reservoirs of oil in every house, and every night recklessly burn their lengths in spermaceti candles” (Melville 73). He goes on about the use of sperm whale oil for British coronations, “...what kind of oil is used at coronations? Certainly it cannot be olive oil, nor Macassar oil, nor castor oil, nor bear’s oil, nor train oil, nor cod-liver oil. What then can it possibly be, but sperm oil in its unmanufactured, unpolluted state, the sweetest of all oils? Think of that, ye loyal Britons! we whalers supply your kings and queens with coronation stuff!” (Melville 154). About the tongue of a whale, “particular tongue now before us; at a passing glance I should say it was a six-barreler; that is, it will yield you about that amount of oil” (Melville 378). Melville compares the large front of the head that contains most of the oil in a sperm whale to the “Heidelberg Tun” which is a wine cask in the Heidelberg Castle that holds 57,000 gallons of wine (Melville 382). Melville comments on ambergris, which was used to enhance the smell of perfume. It was obtained from the intestines of sick whales! “It is of a hue between yellow and ash color. And this, good friends, is ambergris, worth a gold guinea an ounce to any druggist...Who would think, then, that such fine ladies and gentlemen should regale themselves with an essence found in the inglorious bowels of a sick whale! Yet so it is. By some, ambergris is supposed to be the cause, and by others the effect, of the dyspepsia in the whale. How to cure such a dyspepsia it were hard to say, unless by administering three or four boat loads of Brandreth’s pills, and then running out of harm’s way, as laborers do in blasting rocks” (Melville 451). Also, in reference to a whale carcass which “...is disengaged and hoisted on deck for the purpose of extracting the ivory teeth, and furnishing a supply of that hard white whale-bone with which the fishermen fashion all sorts of curious articles, including canes, umbrella-stocks, and handles to riding-whips” (Melville 375). And, this was said of some of the fat of the whale: “It is a most refreshing, convivial, beautiful object to behold. As its name imports, it is of an exceedingly rich, mottled tint, with a be-streaked snowy and golden ground, dotted with spots of the deepest crimson and purple. It is plums of rubies, in pictures of citron. Spite of reason, it is hard to keep yourself from eating it. Plum pudding” (Melville 460).

Whalers also killed and ate porpoises, which are really small whales. In 1776 Linnaeus made a distinction between whales and a fish, and Ishmael states: “A well-fed, plump Huzza Porpoise will yield you one good gallon of good oil. But the fine and delicate fluid extracted from his jaws is exceedingly valuable. It is in request among jewellers and watchmakers. Sailors put it on their hones. Porpoise meat is good eating, you know. It may never have occurred to you that a porpoise spouts. Indeed, his spout is so small that it is not very readily discernible. But the next time you have a chance, watch him; and you will then see the great sperm whale himself in miniature” (Melville 183).

People at the time did not know the number of whales worldwide; they thought the number was limitless. “You may now sometimes sail for weeks and months together, without being greeted by a single spout; and then be suddenly saluted by what sometimes seems thousands on thousands” (Melville 424). Chapter 105 is titled: Does The Whale’s Magnitude Diminish? Will He Perish? (Melville 501). “We account the whale immortal in his species, however perishable in his individuality...if ever the

world is to be again flooded, like the Netherlands, to kill off its rats, then the eternal whale will still survive, and rearing upon the topmost crest of the equatorial flood, spout his frothed defiance..." (Melville 504).

D.H. Lawrence recognizes whales as warm-blooded mammals related to us with his poem, "Whales Weep Not."

They say the sea is cold,  
but the sea contains the hottest blood of all, and the wildest, the most urgent.  
All the whales in the wider deeps [...]  
The right whales, the sperm-whales, the hammer-heads, the killers  
there they blow, there they blow, hot wild white breath out of the sea!

Even though whaling fell out of favor for economic reasons (petroleum replaced sperm whale oil, and the depletion of whales made searching for whales harder and harder) Philbrick remarks, "By the 1860s whalers may have reduced the world's sperm-whale population by as much as 75 percent" (Philbrick 223). Some people, 100 years later, still harbored an attitude of tormenting whales "for sport." In *A Whale for the Killing*, Farley Mowat describes how people in a small town in Newfoundland tormented a female whale that had become trapped in an ice pond. Mowat was a wild-life biologist, who eventually convinced news teams to cover the case. But it was too late; the whale, even though rescued because of a public outcry, died. She had been shot, run into by boats, and generally abused by the Burgeo townspeople. Mowat writes, "'We'd a had it kilt by now,' said one narrow-faced youth, with a sidelong glance in my direction, 'only for someone putting the Mountie onto we!' 'And that's the truth!' replied on of his companions. 'Them people from away better 'tend their own business. Got no call to interfere with we.' He spat in the snow to emphasize his remark. 'What we standing here for?' another asked loudly. 'We's not afeard of any goddam whale. Let's take a run onto the Pond. Might be some sport into it yet'" (Mowat 142).

Mowat describes how the "sportsmen" wore the whale out, "with the usual two or three blows after every dive, but barely had time to suck in a single breath before being driven down again. Her hurried surfacings consequently became more and more frequent even as the sportsmen, gathering courage because the whale showed no sign of retaliation, grew brave and braver. Two of the fastest boats began to circle her at full throttle, like a pair of malevolent water beetles" (Mowat 143).

There is a "Lord of the Flies" type feeling in the book that accelerates with, "Meanwhile, something rather terrible was taking place in the emotions of many of the watchers ringing the Pond. The mood of passive curiosity had dissipated, to be replaced by one of hungry anticipation. Looking into the faces around me, I recognized the same avid air of expectation which contorts the faces of a prizefight audience into primal masks" (Mowat 143).

Mowat ponders on the nature of the people of Burgeo, Newfoundland with, "they are essentially good people. I know that, but what sickens me is their simple failure to resist the impulse of savagery...they seem to be just as capable of being utterly loathsome as the bastards from the cities with their high-powered rifles and telescopic

sights and the mindless compulsion to slaughter everything alive, from squirrels to elephants...I admired them so much because I saw them as a natural people, living in at least some degree of harmony with the natural world. Now they seem nauseatingly anxious to renounce all that and throw themselves in to the stinking quagmire of our society, which has perverted everything natural within itself, and is now busy destroying everything natural outside itself. How can they be so bloody stupid? How could I have been so blood stupid?" (Mowat 148).

With the U.S. Federal Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972, whaling was finally outlawed in this country. It was becoming general knowledge that many whale species, including the sperm whale, were endangered. The International Whaling Commission called for a moratorium on whaling in 1986, although Japan, Norway, and Iceland still hunt whales.

There are many maritime museums in the United States, some of which seek to educate the public about whaling. Some museums, such as the New Bedford, MA, Nantucket, MA, Sag Harbor, NY and Cold Spring Harbor, NY Whaling Museums are dedicated solely to this enterprise (mentioned because they are the closest to New York City). Besides exhibits with artifacts, some have libraries that contain whaler captains' logbooks, which might reveal more about attitudes toward whales. Currently, whaling museums present whaling in ways to preserve a time in our history. For example, the mission statement of the Cold Spring Harbor Whaling Museum (2012) is: "Our mission is to explore the ever changing relationship between humans and whales through inquiry-based education and interpretation of artifacts that emphasize the cultural, scientific and environmental significance of Long Island and the sea. We help members and visitors make informed decisions about our marine environment." As Philbrick mentions of people who visit Nantucket today, "It is not whaling, of course, that brings the tourists to the island, but the romantic glorification of whaling (Philbrick 235).

Whale watching companies have sprung up and seek to educate people about the wonders of whales and let people feel that they can get closer to these animals. Some aquaria, such as the Mystic Aquarium in Connecticut, house whales that appear to be well adjusted (personal experience). The numbers of whales, and other marine mammals, seem to be bouncing back, (although there have been disturbing deaths portrayed lately in the news, perhaps due to global warming) and make it more likely for paying participants to sight whales, thus making whale-watching a profitable venture. Braga de Moraes, et al. (2017) suspect in a recent review of whale catches in the western South Atlantic that the recovery of whales such as the humpback might be overestimated. This could be because historical whaling records from the 1600's to the 1900's might not have always be accurate.

In conclusion, many people (except for those in three countries where whale hunting is a part of the culture) have a positive attitude about whales and want to protect them. They would be appalled if we were to offer "whale meat" on the menu. I feel it is combination of not needing whales for oil or corsets, and listening to scientists regale us with information about how they are much like us, that has helped us reach this point in our cultural evolution about our attitude about whales. We can truly, at least

in this country, say we have gone from hunting whales to appreciating the wonderment of whales through the act of whale watching.

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### Comment on Nolan

Ian S. Maloney

In her essay, "From Leviathan to Saint," Dr. Kathleen Nolan explores shifting attitudes towards whales from the 19<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> centuries with particular attention paid to two texts: Herman Melville's novel *Moby-Dick* (1851) and Farley Mowat's book *A Whale for the Killing* (1972). On the surface, some of this shift is just changes in human behavior and consumption. We no longer rely on whale oil for lamp lighting or ambergris for perfume. Petroleum and electricity have ended reliance on whale oil for fuel (and hopefully wind and solar power will eventually replace them). We've also learned some of the consequences to our predatory behavior and that species become extinct after over-hunting and human carelessness with animal habitats. But, embedded in Nolan's essay is a deeper concern with consistent human cruelty and mob mentality, seen in both texts. Her essay notes the shift to reverence and watching we have for these marine mammals, and yet what is most striking is the allusion to the dark underbelly of group violence connecting these whale stories across centuries.

*Moby-Dick*'s Ishmael fascinates us as a chronicler, an artist, a naturalist, and a philosopher of the whale ship. He accepts the "savage" Pacific Islander Queequeg as best friend and confidant and takes the worst ship's pay (in whaleman's terms the last lay) for the adventure and honor of the voyage. He thus foreshadows the notion that the last will become first. His worldly vision encompasses so much around him and swells with transcendental acceptance of the divine flowing through the seas and universe. He knows that he makes a sorry lookout for whales because of his persistent pondering of immortality over Cartesian vortices. Nolan notes that the idea of the Whale fascinates the narrator; as Ishmael states, this "portentous and mysterious monster roused all my curiosity" (Melville 48). But Ishmael seems often to be consumed by the deity in the creature, its "god-like dignity," and then simultaneously stunned by the sublime in the whale, its "appalling beauty of the vast milky mass." Ishmael appeals to the reader because of the reverence and awe he has for his subject. Unlike the Essex story where Melville drew his inspiration, you don't see Ishmael give into what Nathaniel Philbrick describes as the "repetitious nature of the work" which desensi-

tized men to the wonders of the whale. We don't see this in Ishmael. That is why the shift in his tone after Ahab's revelation of vengeance against the White Whale is so disturbing to us. Sure, Ishmael lists how whales are useful as food, oil, and tools. He also pines on about whales in pictures and sculptures and ancient mythologies. Readers sense that there is an open-minded, ethical and independent mind at work in him. We're drawn in by the curious, speculative natural philosopher in this not-so-common whaler. What Nolan is able to connect is the terrifying nature of the savagery that can be seen both in Melville and Mowat. Even the most thoughtful or good-natured of us may descend into cruelty, ignorance, and savagery.

Mowat writes of an actual mob killing of a whale trapped in the Newfoundland bay of Burgeo: "what sickens me is their simple failure to resist the impulse of savagery...How can they be so bloody stupid? How could I have been so blood stupid?" (148). That's the very question which strikes the careful reader of *Moby-Dick*. How could the reader be lulled into Ishmael's dreamy musings of the whale only to be thrust into the realization that Ishmael accepts Ahab's mindless blood vengeance? Ishmael says, "Ahab's quenchless feud seemed mine" (Melville 219). I don't think it's accidental that *Moby-Dick's* revival and rediscovery came during a period of totalitarian fear. American and German scholars noted the prescient foreshadowing of Melville's 1851 Ahab in the rhetoric of ruthless leaders of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. What happens when even the ethical are consumed by the power of mob or the will of a dictator?

Mowat witnessed blood sport in common people. A group descended on a trapped mammal and killed her for sport. Passive spectators turn into primal beasts. This isn't far from Melville's fear in 1851. What happens when a thoughtful, intelligent narrator, taken with the incredible splendor and energy in the natural beauty of the whale, gives up his wonder and agency to follow the monomaniacal commands of a mad, villainous dictator out for vengeance on a dumb brute? Melville knew this was always in the heart of humankind. He understood that humans aren't logical, nor do they always follow the better angels of their minds and hearts, nor do they often understand the consequences of their behaviors on others. That's why this work sticks with us; it reminds us that humans can be cruel and unthinking creatures sometimes. They can bend to the irrational will of others. This is a fact we forget at our own peril, for in stories (fiction or not) we are reminded of the cruel primitive demons of our darker selves. Nolan's essay leads us through these worlds back to the world of conservation, protection, and scientific exploration and knowledge. However, the most startling connection is to see the consistent presence of mob violence and cruelty, even when we least expect it from a wandering, philosophical, natural historian narrator or a group of "simple" people living close to the land they profess to love and respect. Melville and Mowat remind us to question the saintliness of our watching, peaceful selves and to be wary of the primitive killers lurking under our collective human heart of darkness.

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